STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

SELECTED SPEECHES OF SPEAKER SOMNATH CHATTERJEE

LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

Importance of Parliament

Today, we are living in a society, where different generations have a fairly good and realistic understanding of the importance of Parliament in our political life. The poor and the rich, the illiterate and the literate, the farmer and the professional, are all aware of the tremendous impact that the Parliament has in our political process. What is the visible result of this realisation? Parliament has become increasingly representative of all those different classes and shades of opinion in the country.

Parliament, in a genuine democracy, must reflect the heterogeneity and the demographic composition of the society, more importantly, the socio-political aspirations of a majority of the people. Changes in the composition and character of the representative institutions mark only a positive beginning towards the restructuring of the socio-economic foundations of our nation.

Democratic Consolidation and Development

Today we are a self-reliant economy and a self-sufficient granary which, on its own, is feeding the world's second largest population. Besides having a formidable industrial and military base, we have built up one of the world's largest pools of scientific and technological manpower... We achieved all this despite the fact that in the past half-a-century, we faced many critical situations, numerous challenges from within and without trying to devide the country on the basis of religion and caste, insurgencies, waves of terrorism, proxy wars and external aggressions. Our biggest achievement has been that the common man remained unshaken all through this period in his faith in the democratic system.

Value-based Politics

Politics and politicians cannot be expected to earn respectability, unless politics is firmly wedded to some basic values and some fundamental principles. This can come about only with the firm resolve of the nation. The nation as a whole must be united in this struggle to bring values to the centre stage of our public life... The price we pay for political indifference is bad governance, which affects almost every aspect of our life. We cannot expect to get good governance from bad politics. Therefore, making politics ethically sound is one of the most pressing needs of our times.

Separation of Powers

The principle of separation of powers, clearly provided for in our Constitution... is not an optional feature to be selectively recognized by the organs of the State, but is one of the most essential directives of our Constitution, which has to inform every aspect of administration in the country. Otherwise, the constitutional basis of our Republic and the credibility

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PREFACE

The Speaker of Lok Sabha is one of the highest constitutional dignitaries who occupies a key position in our polity. What makes the Speaker's position especially significant is the fact that while he lives and functions in the thick of politics, he is expected to be above political considerations in the discharge of his constitutional obligations. In other words, he does not represent the Ruling Party or the Opposition, but the collective wisdom of the House as a whole, which comprises various political shades and regional hues across the national spectrum. Therefore, what he speaks assumes a great significance because the Speaker is non-political in character and national in perspective.

Strange it may sound though, the Speaker hardly speaks in the House. The Speaker, usually a seasoned political leader and eminent parliamentarian, has to ensure that others speak as well as listen in an orderly atmosphere in the Chamber. However, outside the House, the Speaker is a much sought after dignitary by a number of Organizations, Associations, Institutions, etc. to grace their occasions of varying nature. Members of Parliament, because of their own association with different institutions and involvement with various causes and events, also approach the Speaker for his presence at several functions. And, what he speaks on such occasions assumes importance because he has to delve on the subject and raise the debate on key issues involved to a higher level of discourse with his own thinking. What he says must be thought-provoking and yet be above controversy. This requires contemplation of a high order for anybody.

When the Speaker in question is no less than Shri Somnath Chatterjee, the exercise assumes far more seriousness. Given his gigantic political stature and long innings as a parliamentarian stretching over four decades, there is a great expectation on what he would say on a given subject and Shri Chatterjee knows this very well. As a prominent figure on the Opposition side for decades, Shri Chatterjee played a vocal and vital role in the political affairs of the nation when he spoke at length on various issues in the House as a Member. After Shri Chatterjee occupied the high office of the Speaker of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, the House lost the opportunity of listening to him, as the Speaker is not required to speak much in the House! A loss to the House, however, became a gain to the nation at large as he went fully prepared to speak extensively on various subjects during the course of the last five years.

This volume, a compilation of about 226 Speeches delivered by Speaker Shri Somnath Chatterjee reflects his depth of understanding and the richness of perspective on a wide array of subjects. Shri Chatterjee accepted the

invitations, which flooded his office, with discretion. He graced such occasions where the subject matter and the events were befitting his stature not only as the Speaker of Lok Sabha but also as a profound thinker, erudite scholar and a legal luminary. Wherever he went and whenever he spoke, he spoke with great lucidity and luminous clarity, which created a thought-provoking atmosphere. This he accomplished with a rare distinction.

Shri Somnath Chatterjee spoke on subjects as varied as democracy and development, the institution of Parliament, ethics in public life, legal and constitutional matters, federal issues, socio-political issues, India's external relations, media issues, education (including Convocation Addresses delivered at leading Universities across the nation), environment, etc., with an amazing profundity that has, always, been his hallmark. A constitutional dignitary is usually much in demand to grace events and occasions with his presence even if he is not familiar with the subject matter because the organizers hope to get patronage and publicity for their causes by such VIP presence. But, Shri Somnath Chatterjee attended only such events and occasions where the subject matter is close to his heart. He never sought a platform to air his views, but several platforms sought his views on subjects to benefit from the breadth of his intellectual horizons. That is why, he took a keen personal interest in the speeches he delivered. He did not read out what others drafted; he had definite views on specific themes and he spoke at length, raising key issues involved in the subject in question. He did full justice to the occasion enthralling his audience with his eloquence and erudition. It is important that the benefit of the ideas contained in such speeches is not restricted to only those who attended the events. The general public also should have access to such speeches.

It is precisely for this reason that the Lok Sabha Secretariat is bringing out a compilation of Shri Somnath Chatterjee's select speeches in one Volume. Part One of the Publication is a profile of Shri Somnath Chatterjee which includes the highlights of his public life. Part Two covers the Addresses delivered by Shri Chatterjee after assumption of the Office of Speaker of Lok Sabha. Select photographs of functions where Shri Chatterjee delivered speeches are also part of this publication.

I have no doubt that the readers would immensely benefit from this compilation, which is organized in a reader-friendly manner and printed in a font pleasing to the eye. I am sure that this Volume will be found useful and informative by a cross section of society such as parliamentarians, academia, media, researchers, scholars, students of parliamentary political science, civil servants, and civil society organizations, to name a few.

New Delhi
May, 2009

P. D. T. ACHARY
Secretary-General
Lok Sabha

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIPP	All India *Panchayat Parishad*
AIWC	All India Whips' Conference
APLAP	The Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific
BAI	Bar Association of India
BPST	Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training
BSS	*Bharat Sevashram Sangha*
CAPEXIL	Chemicals and Allied Products Export Promotion Council
CGA	Committee on Government Assurances
CPA	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
CSE	Centre for Science and Environment
CSIR	Council of Scientific and Industrial Research
CVC	Central Vigilance Commission
DRSC	Departmentally Related Standing Committee
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
HR	Human Rights
IAHS	International Association for Housing Science
IAP	Indian Association of Physiotherapists
IAPPD	Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development
ICISA	International Centre for Information Systems and Audit
IPCC	Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IRMA	Institute of Rural Management, Anand
KILA	Kerala Institute of Local Administration
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MKSS	*Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan*
MPLAD	Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme
NERCPA	North East-Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
PRIs	*Panchayati Raj* Institutions
PSUs	Public Sector Undertakings
RTI	Right to Information
SAFMA	South Asian Free Media Association
SANCOSAN	South Asian Conference on Sanitation
SBI	State Bank of India
TBS	*Tarun Bharat Sangh*
TERI	The Energy and Resources Institute
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

PART I

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE—
A PROFILE

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE
Hon'ble Speaker, Fourteenth Lok Sabha

The Speaker is one of the highest constitutional functionaries in our country's parliamentary system. He is the symbol of the dignity and independence of the Lok Sabha. The sustenance of people's faith in the democratic institutions depends greatly on the finesse and effectiveness with which the Speaker conducts the proceedings of the House, which is the highest Legislative Body in the country. The Lok Sabha, down its history of over five decades, has had a galaxy of eminent Speakers, who have lent dignity and prestige to the Chair. Shri Somnath Chatterjee joined this illustrious line of Presiding Officers, when he was elected unanimously to the exalted position of the Speaker on 4 June 2004.

A forceful and powerful voice in our national life for several decades, Shri Somnath Chatterjee, during his term, enriched the great legacy of the august office of the Speaker

A sagacious leader, an articulate parliamentarian, an eminent lawyer, and a committed trade union leader, Shri Somnath Chatterjee has been a towering figure in the national life. His journey from the 5th Lok Sabha to the august office of the Lok Sabha Speaker has been a saga of nearly forty years of long and distinguished parliamentary life.

Born in Tezpur in Assam on 25 July 1929 to Shri N.C. Chatterjee and Smt. Binapani Debi, Shri Somnath Chatterjee had his education in Calcutta and the United Kingdom. He completed his Masters from Cambridge and Barrister-at-Law from Middle Temple, U.K. His father, Shri N.C. Chatterjee, a distinguished member of Parliament of the First, Third and Fourth Lok Sabha, was an outstanding orator who enriched the parliamentary polity by his brilliance and articulation. Shri Somnath Chatterjee carried on the tradition of serving the parliamentary institution set by his illustrious father. Shri Somnath Chatterjee is married to Smt. Renu Chatterjee and they have one son and two daughters.

Political Career

Shri Somnath Chatterjee began his career as a lawyer and joined active politics in 1968, when he became a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). His ascendance in national politics began with his election to the Fifth Lok Sabha in 1971. Since then, he has served as a member of successive

Lok Sabhas, getting elected for the tenth time to the Fourteenth Lok Sabha in 2004. He was the Leader of the CPI(M) in Lok Sabha from 1989 to 2004 and was the party's leading spokesman for several years.

During his long and distinguished parliamentary career, he lost the election only once in 1984, but won in a by-election and entered the Eighth Lok Sabha in 1985. The fact that he won the Lok Sabha elections with impressive margins eloquently testifies to his popularity among the masses and his stature as a parliamentarian. And, as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Shri Somnath Chatterjee has passionately and zealously been endeavouring to infuse transparency and greater accountability in the functioning of the Parliament.

Parliamentary Career

In March 1971, when Shri Somnath Chatterjee entered the Lok Sabha for the first time, stalwarts like A.K. Gopalan, Prof. Hiren Mukerjee, Jyotirmoy Basu, Madhu Limaye, H.V. Kamat, Indrajit Gupta, Y.B. Chavan, Jagjivan Ram, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Chandra Shekhar adorned the front benches. The speeches of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Shri Nath Pai and his father, Shri N.C. Chatterjee, and many other veterans had already left a great imprint on the mind of Shri Somnath Chatterjee and it was but natural that he made his mark as an outstanding debator right from his first stint in the Lok Sabha. In the years to follow, Shri Chatterjee, with an abiding faith in parliamentary democracy, has represented the people with commitment, dedication and sincerity. He has constantly endeavoured to preserve and strengthen the lofty principles of secularism, socialism, national integrity and probity in public life. The House has benefited greatly from his erudite views and legal acumen. His expertise on law had a considerable impact in shaping legislations in diverse areas – corporate, fiscal, commercial, criminal and constitutional laws.

Deeply distressed as he has been by the fact that millions of people are deprived of employment, education, social justice and healthcare and live in acute poverty, Shri Chatterjee has contributed richly to the deliberations of the House by actively and forcefully participating in the debates on socio-welfare centric issues impacting the masses. He never missed an opportunity to articulate the cause of the common man, the working class, the peasants and the under-privileged sections of society on the floor of the House. During the discussion on atrocities on the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, he once said in Parliament: "It is a matter of great concern, if not a national shame, that the House is obliged to discuss this matter...almost during every Session...Not only...we find that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes still remain steeped in gnawing poverty, they are not even being treated as

human being in many places." By his active and forceful participation in the proceedings of Parliament, he strived to uphold and advance fundamental human freedoms. In the process, he focused the nation's attention to the problems of the common man and made Parliament the voice of the people.

It is often said that Lok Sabha debates were incomplete without Shri Somnath Chatterjee's participation. With his long parliamentary experience and power of reasoning, he has forcefully set forth his views on a wide range of issues – rationale of governance through coalition, separation of powers, federalism, secularism, liberalism, national integration, macro and micro-economics, employment situation and poverty alleviation, to name just a few. He has equally been sensitive to the winds of change blowing across the world, of liberalization and globalization, of technology and of economic reforms. It is his firm conviction that it is only by following pragmatic policies that India can catch up with other countries, compete in the world market and attract private and foreign capital for industrial and infrastructural development.

Shri Somnath Chatterjee has been a consistent and firm believer in the efficacy of parliamentary democracy in India. For him, it is an instrument of social and economic change. With his vast experience in public affairs, an immense capacity for hard work, a passion for objectivity and rational thinking and a razor sharp intellect, Shri Somnath Chatterjee has enhanced the content and level of debates in the House on numerous issues.

A versatile parliamentarian, well versed with the rules of procedure and conduct of business of the House, Shri Somnath Chatterjee has also richly contributed to the strengthening of the Committee System in Parliament. He served with distinction as the Chairman, Committee on Subordinate Legislation; Committee of Privileges; Committee on Railways; Committee on Communications (3 terms); and Committee on Information Technology (2 terms). He was an active member of various other Parliamentary and Consultative Committees. He was, among others, a member of the Rules Committee, General Purposes Committee, Business Advisory Committee and Ethics Committee. Besides, he was associated as a member with several Joint and Select Committees, particularly the ones requiring expertise in law. The impact of his legal farsightedness as a barrister and as a senior lawyer could be seen clearly in shaping legislation in diverse areas, both in the House and its Committees.

Shri Somnath Chatterjee's impressive credentials as a parliamentarian and his long tenure as member of Parliament are evidence of his commitment to the highest traditions of parliamentary democracy. He is widely respected for his political vision, noble values and deep sensitivity and empathy. In recognition of his immense and invaluable contribution towards the

strengthening of parliamentary democracy and parliamentary institutions in the country, Shri Somnath Chatterjee was honoured with the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award in the year 1996. While conferring the Award, the then President of India, Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma had said: "His debating skills, lucid articulation, command over parliamentary practice and procedure, willingness to hear and give due weight to the other side, power of repartee, and his courteousness, sense of justice and of fair play, comprise the gifts of a parliamentarian of the first quality." Speaking on the occasion, the then Vice-President, Shri K.R. Narayanan, described him as a consistent and firm believer in the efficacy of parliamentary democracy in India. Elucidating on the exemplary responsibility displayed by Shri Somnath Chatterjee in raising matters on the floor of the House, the then Prime Minister, Shri H.D. Deve Gowda, had said: "A forceful Speaker, his stentorian voice has risen above many a tumult to be recorded for posterity...As in nature, the echoes of his thunder have reverberated long after the memory of the lightning that caused it had faded. No greater tribute can be paid to him than to say that a debate without his participation would be poorer for it."

Election as the Speaker of Lok Sabha

When the newly constituted Fourteenth Lok Sabha met for the first time on 2 June 2004, Shri Somnath Chatterjee was appointed the Speaker *pro tem* by the President, to perform the duties of the Speaker and preside over the sittings of the Lok Sabha. The date for holding the election to the office of the Speaker was fixed as 4 June 2004.

On 4 June, Shri Balasaheb Vikhe Patil, the newly appointed Speaker *pro tem*, performed the duties of the office of the Speaker. The Leader of the Congress Party, Smt. Sonia Gandhi, moved the Motion proposing the election of Shri Somnath Chatterjee as the Speaker. The Motion was seconded by the Leader of the House, Shri Pranab Mukherjee. Later, Leaders of seventeen other parties in the Lok Sabha also proposed his name which were seconded by Leaders of other parties. When the Motion was put before the House for consideration and vote, it was unanimously adopted by the House and Shri Somnath Chatterjee was chosen as the Speaker of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha.

By electing Shri Chatterjee, the House had created an unprecedented history, as it was, for the first time, the Speaker *pro tem* was elected as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. It was also a significant event that the Speaker was chosen on the basis of consensus among political parties, with as many as 18 nomination papers filed cutting across party lines in favour of the candidature of Shri Somnath Chatterjee. Also, it was for the first time that a member of the CPI (M) was elected to the Office of the Speaker.

Felicitating the Speaker, the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, said that Shri Chatterjee's life and work as a parliamentarian had been a source of tremendous inspiration. The House had a wise shepherd in him to guide all the members. The Prime Minister expressed confidence that under Shri Somnath Chatterjee, the proceedings of the House would be conducted in the highest traditions of democracy and hoped that the deliberations would be characterized by reason, compassion, and a deep commitment to both efficiency and equity in the process of governance.

The Leader of the Opposition, Shri L.K. Advani, expressed great pleasure on Shri Somnath Chatterjee's unanimous election and said the Opposition also proposed his name for the Office of the Speaker which was unprecedented, adding the difference in ideologies should not creep insofar as the election of the Speaker was concerned.

Accepting the felicitations, Speaker Shri Somnath Chatterjee, *inter alia*, said:

> The Fourteenth Lok Sabha has got the people's mandate to usher in a new era. This is a unique responsibility bestowed on this august House. Our country has made progress in various fields since Independence. However, a lot more needs to be done for the benefit of the common people. We have to ensure that the creative potential and energies of our people are harnessed for fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of various sections of our society, particularly the deprived and the dispossessed, by providing a pro-people, secular administration.
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> ...Nowadays, considerable criticism is being faced by the members of Parliament both about their failure to maintain decorum and dignity in the House. The behaviour and conduct of some legislators has become subject of justified criticism and in some cases even of ridicule. Unfortunately, there is developing more and more attitude of confrontation than cooperation in our political life which finds its reflection in the House. We should resolve to change this perception in the minds of the people by our own conduct, both inside and outside the House.
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> ...I shall discharge my functions entrusted to this office more as a duty rather than as an authority.
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> ...I assure you that I shall always strive to protect to the best of my ability the rights and privileges of the House and of its members irrespective of their political affiliations.

Let us resolve that we shall perform the task assigned to us to the best of our ability and with sincerity. *We should ask ourselves when the House rises for the day every evening as to what we have done during the day for the country and for the people and whether we have justified the people's faith in sending us here. Nothing will give us more satisfaction than the feeling that we have tried and done our best.*

As Speaker

As Speaker, Shri Somnath Chatterjee epitomizes the dignity and credibility of the House of the People and manifests the essence of parliamentary democracy espousing the hopes and aspirations of the people. He has brought nobility and prestige to the Chair by his impartial and liberal approach. He undoubtedly had all the credentials for the august office – his long and rich parliamentary experience, his legal acumen and vast knowledge of Constitution, his commitment to strengthening parliamentary institutions and above all, his straightforwardness and fair-mindedness. His quest for maintaining decorum, dignity and decency of the House was visible from the day he assumed the Office of the Speaker. His rare ability to assess the mood of the House and his pragmatic approach helped him in discharging the onerous responsibility of the Speaker of Lok Sabha in a dignified way. Shri Chatterjee has been firm yet flexible, stern yet kind and sympathetic and always fair to all sections of the House.

There were many challenges that Shri Chatterjee faced in each Session which he handled with finesse and firmness. He had been sensitive to the fact that more and more individual issues were taking up a large part of the time of the House and unfortunately, confrontation than cooperation, was affecting the functioning of the House. He repeatedly emphasized that Parliament should function through debate, discussion and consensus and it could do so only if the deliberations were marked by a sense of commitment to the cause of the people and the atmosphere in the House was kept free from adjournments, walk-out, etc. He believes that dissent and freedom of debate are the hallmarks of parliamentary democracy and accountability to the constitutional functionaries is the keystone of a parliamentary set-up. He ceaselessly strove to remind the Treasury and the Opposition Benches that they both have equal responsibility in ensuring good governance and both sides are expected to be accommodating and forebearing to each other, particularly when contentious issues are debated on the floor of the House. Shri Somnath Chatterjee also reminded the members that it is the quality of their behaviour and the substance of the deliberation that would enhance the prestige of the House and reinforce faith in the parliamentary institutions.

Shri Chatterjee initiated several procedural reforms to facilitate smooth and orderly functioning of the House and also to provide more opportunities to the members in discharging their responsibility as people's representatives in an effective manner. He regularly interacted with the Leaders and Whips of Political Parties to discuss the issues to be raised and for the proper conduct of the proceedings. In fact, he started a new practice of holding daily meetings with the Leaders of Parties and Groups in his Chamber, half-an-hour before the start of the day's proceedings during the Sessions, which indeed proved to be very useful in obviating disruptions and disturbances in the House.

Shri Somnath Chatterjee, a disciplined parliamentarian himself, has all along been concerned about the prudent management of the precious time of the House. As Speaker, he steadfastly worked for maintaining discipline and decorum in the House and unequivocally voiced his anguish over the wastage of parliamentary time by the members. He said: 'there is no alternative to, nor can there be any substitute of, informed and structured debate and discussion and we should... utilize every minute of available time for the sake of our people.' In order to sensitize the members about the usage of pattern of the time of the House, he started an innovative practice of making a weekly Statement of the business transacted by the House on every Tuesday. Also, for the better functioning of the House, Shri Chatterjee ensured that the Rule, regarding members speaking from their allocated seats, is strictly enforced.

Shri Chatterjee facilitated opportunities to members to raise more matters on the floor of the House and to hold the Executive accountable by way of Calling Attention Notices and Short Duration Discussions. There was a marked increase in the Calling Attention Notices and Short Duration Discussions under his Speakership. He also made procedural reforms to make the Question Hour more participatory. The device of 'Zero Hour', which was not regulated by any specific rule, was streamlined and adopted in a phased manner during his tenure to enable the members to raise matters in an orderly fashion. Accordingly, in the first phase, after the Question Hour, opportunity is provided to five to six members to raise extremely urgent national and international issues and in the second phase, matters of public importance, including constituency matters, are raised by the members after 6:00 pm.

To ensure greater and effective accountability of the Government's functioning, Shri Somnath Chatterjee restructured the Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs) of Parliament. Apart from increasing the number of DRSCs from seventeen to twenty-four, Shri Somnath Chatterjee introduced a new Direction 73A for the timely implementation of the recommendations contained in the reports of the DRSCs. The new Direction, which made it mandatory for the Ministers to make Statements in the House

once in six months regarding the status of the implementation of the recommendations of the Parliamentary Committees with regard to the Ministries concerned, has definitely ensured accountability at the highest level of the Government. Also, to address the growing concern regarding Study Tours of the Parliamentary Committees which had drawn criticism and media attention, Shri Somnath Chatterjee issued two sets of guidelines to streamline them, *viz.* the *Guidelines to Chairmen, Parliamentary Committees* and *Guidelines regarding Expenditure incurred by the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha Secretariats on Study Tours of Parliamentary Committees.*

While conducting the proceedings of the House of the People, Shri Somnath Chatterjee realized that several issues of long-term national importance did not receive due attention of the House, particularly due to lack of time. With a view to providing a platform to the members to have interaction with experts and with key officials of the Ministries and the civil society, the Parliamentary Forums on Water Conservation and Management; on Youth; on Children; on Population and Public Health; and on Global Warming and Climate Change were constituted during his Speakership. The focused and meaningful discussions in these Fora have indeed helped in formulating a result-oriented approach for the speedy and effective implementation of various programmes in diverse fields.

Further, to facilitate exchange of views on issues of topical concern between the members of Parliament and experts in diverse fields, Shri Somnath Chatterjee took a new initiative to enlighten the members about various contemporary problems having a bearing on the socio-economic fabric of our society and thereby sensitizing them about these problems through the Lecture Series for members of Parliament. The Lecture Series, inaugurated on 17 August 2005, with the first Lecture on *Water Conservation*, has had twenty-three more Lectures on various topics which have not only helped members in playing a proactive role in addressing these problems meaningfully but also enhanced the level of debate in the House.

Shri Somnath Chatterjee has always considered the institution of Parliament as a temple of democracy and as such has great respect for its traditions and conventions. As the Presiding Officer, he has expressed his anguish and concern, time and again, at the conduct of the members and requested them to ponder whether the democratic set-up has been strengthened or weakened by such indecorous happenings in the House. Distressed by the emerging situation, he initiated a series of Round Table Discussions to involve all the stakeholders of democracy to make it more participatory and responsive. The First Round Table Discussion on *Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy* was held in New Delhi on 4 September 2008 in which eminent parliamentarians, legal luminaries, renowned

academics, veteran media persons and civil society leaders expressed deep concern over the present unfortunate and disquieting state of democracy, especially our parliamentary institutions, and called for urgent remedial measures to redress the situation. The Second Round Table Discussion on the same theme was held on 1 November 2008.

The salaries and allowances of members of Parliament has been one area which has attracted criticism from several quarters for a long time. To bring about greater transparency in the working of Parliament, Shri Chatterjee, in consultation with the Leaders of Political Parties, initiated the process of setting up an independent Salaries Commission to determine the salaries and allowances of members. This is to replace the present system of members determining their own salaries. The proposal to appoint an independent Commission to consider and recommend, appropriate salaries and allowances for members of Parliament, according to a scientific criteria, is being examined by the Central Government. Further, as declaration of assets by members promotes transparency and openness in public life, through regular persuasion, it has been ensured by Shri Chatterjee that all members make declaration of their assets and liabilities, as required by law. With the enactment of the Right to Information Act in 2005, a new regime of transparency has been ushered in the Lok Sabha and its Secretariat.

It is very important for India, as the world's largest functioning democracy, to register her presence internationally in an appropriate manner and be a party in setting the agenda at different important multilateral parliamentary fora, instead of being just a participant. Shri Somnath Chatterjee took several steps during the visits of Indian Parliamentary Delegations (IPDs) so as to uphold the dignity of the nation as well as to enhance the level of discussions during the international conferences. It was at his initiative that more and more preparatory briefing meetings were held so as to ensure that the delegates are fully equipped to participate in the deliberations effectively. Also it was primarily due to his special diplomatic efforts that Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, the Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, was elected by an overwhelming majority as the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) on 2 September 2005 for a three-year term. This honour came to an Indian delegate after twenty years. Simultaneously, in 2005, as the Presiding Officer of the Lok Sabha, Shri Chatterjee was elected as the Vice-President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and India was given the honour of hosting the 53rd CPA Conference. In September 2006, Shri Chatterjee was elected as the President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Under his leadership and able guidance, India successfully hosted the 53rd CPA Conference in New Delhi during September 2007. In addition to these, seven Conferences of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, including

two Emergency Conferences, were held under Shri Chatterjee's Chairmanship at Kolkata (October 2004), New Delhi (March and July 2005 and February 2006), Raipur (November 2005), Thiruvananthapuram (May 2007) and Chandigarh (September 2008) to discuss procedural and other related matters.

As the Speaker Lok Sabha, Shri Somnath Chatterjee led Parliamentary Delegations to the 111th, 112th, 113th, 115th and 117th Assemblies of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and participated actively in their deliberations. Besides participating in the 18th and 19th Conferences of the Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth Parliaments in January 2006 and January 2008, he also led Parliamentary Delegations to the 50th, 51st, 52nd, and 54th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conferences. Shri Chatterjee addressed the Wilton Park Conference jointly organized by the CPA and the World Bank on the theme *What Should be Parliamentarians' Priorities to Reduce Poverty?* in June 2006 in U.K. He also led the Indian Parliamentary Delegation to Helsinki for the celebrations of the 100th Anniversary of the Parliamentary Reforms in Finland in June 2006. As Speaker, he led Parliamentary Delegations to Japan, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Germany, China, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Cuba and Bulgaria. Parliamentary Delegations from Thailand, Poland, Pakistan, Iran, Jordan, Malaysia, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, Chile, Tajikistan, Belarus, European Parliament, Iceland, Morocco, Namibia, Armenia, Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, Norway, Cuba, Germany, Kingdom of Bahrain, Sweden, Slovak Republic, Afghanistan and Indonesia visited the Indian Parliament and exchanged views with the Speaker Shri Chatterjee and members of Parliament. Besides, several visiting Heads of State and Government and eminent leaders and personalities from around the world called on him since he took over as the Lok Sabha Speaker. During these interactions, Shri Chatterjee forcefully articulated India's views and concerns on various contemporary issues. He also initiated the practice of laying the Reports of the International Conferences and visits by the Indian Parliamentary Delegations abroad on the Table of the House.

Shri Somnath Chatterjee has been a votary of building bridges amongst peoples through the instrumentality of democratic institutions. During his term, forty-four Friendship Groups have been constituted with Parliaments of other countries with the main objective of enhancing contacts and interactions among parliamentarians.

Shri Chatterjee has been keen to honour national leaders and to promote their ideals. With this in mind, he facilitated the unveiling of the statues and portraits of several eminent personalities in the Parliament House. The statue of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda were unveiled in the Parliament House Complex on 23 August 2006 and the statue of Guru Rabindranath Tagore was unveiled in the Parliament Library Building

on 7 December 2005. The statues of Maharana Pratap, Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Devi Ahilyabai Holkar, Kittur Rani Channamma, Vithalbhai Patel, Acharya Narendra Deva, S.A. Dange, Indrajit Gupta, A.K. Gopalan, M.G. Ramachandran, Bhupesh Gupta, Murasoli Maran, Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj and a bust of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were unveiled during the Speakership of Shri Chatterjee. Besides the portraits of Subramaniam Bharathi, Sarat Chandra Bose, Tridib Kumar Chaudhuri, Vasudev Balwant Phadke, Acharya J.B. Kripalani, Damodaram Sanjivayya, Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh, Biju Patnaik, Bipin Chandra Pal, the joint portrait of Violet and Joachim Alva, Satguru Ram Singhji, Biplabi Leela Roy, Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, Babu Veer Kunwar Singh, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, Swaran Singh, Shaheed Jayee Rajguru and Bhupendra Nath Basu were also unveiled.

Under the benign guidance of Speaker Shri Somanth Chatterjee, an Annual Parliamentary Lecture has been instituted in the memory of Prof. Hiren Mukerjee, one of India's most outstanding parliamentarians who has contributed immensely towards strengthening the democratic system. The Inaugural Lecture on *Demands for Justice* was delivered by the Nobel Laureate and Lamont Professor at the Harvard University, Prof. Amartya Sen, in the Central Hall of Parliament House on 11 August 2008. A portrait of Prof. Hiren Mukerjee was also unveiled on the occasion.

During the period, under the guidance of Shri Chatterjee, monographs on Prof. Hiren Mukerjee, Babu Jagjivan Ram, Madhu Dandavate, Indrajit Gupta and Madhu Limaye were brought out by the Lok Sabha Secretariat to honour these eminent parliamentarians. In addition, several publications including, *Parliament of India, 60 Years of India's Independence, Speaker Rules, Constitution Amendment in India,* Deluxe edition of the *Constitution of India, Commemorative Souvenir* on the occasion of 53rd CPA Conference and Special Supplement of the *Parliamentarian* were brought out.

The core of parliamentary democracy is effectuating a synergy between Parliament and the people. As people's dreams and aspirations are shaped into reality on the floor of the House, Shri Somnath Chatterjee felt that there is an urgent need to disseminate its role and functioning among people. His conviction, that people have the right to know what is happening in the House and how their representatives are discharging their duties as members, blended with his vision, with the launch of the Lok Sabha Television Channel (LSTV). The 24-hour Channel, besides telecasting the live proceedings of the House, is working as an interface between the 'People, Parliament, and the Government'. It is the only TV Channel in the world to be owned and operated by Parliament and enjoys full autonomy.

The setting-up of the hi-tech story-telling Parliament Museum is yet another initiative taken by Shri Chatterjee. The Museum, which has attracted thousands of visitors from all over the world, depicts the continuum of democratic ethos and institutional development in India. The story of India's rich democratic and parliamentary heritage, various facets of democracy with its roots in ancient times, India's struggle for Independence, and the growth and working of parliamentary institutions in our country come alive before the visitors and involve them emotionally in virtual reality portrayals.

As an extension of the ongoing efforts of communicating Parliament more effectively and also with a view to facilitating media persons accredited to Parliament, Orientation Programmes and Seminars are being conducted by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST) on regular basis to apprise them of the operational techniques of parliamentary procedures and practices. The regular interactions between the editors and senior correspondents of the media and the Speaker have also been institutionalized during Shri Chatterjee's tenure.

The legacy of parliamentary and democratic culture is carried forward by the younger generation. With a view to promoting knowledge about Parliament to them, an Internship Programme has been introduced by the BPST in January 2008 under the inspiring guidance of Shri Somnath Chatterjee. The Programme, which is of one-year duration, aims at providing an opportunity to five young men and women with meritorious achievements to acquaint themselves with the working of parliamentary democracy and democratic institutions, and especially about the Indian parliamentary system.

Besides, the rich reservoir of books and journals of the Parliament Library which were accessible only to the members have now been extended to the journalists, researchers and students of educational institutions. Shri Chatterjee's love and affection towards the children was manifested with the setting up of *Children's Corner* in the Parliament Library Building with the objective of inculcating and encouraging good reading habits among the children.

Parliament being the embodiment of the sovereignty of our country, holds a place of pre-eminence in our body politic. Hence, maintaining its sanctity and putting in place a fool-proof security system is of paramount importance. Several measures in this regard were taken by Speaker Shri Chatterjee; important among these included the installation of Perimeter Protection System by specifically making barbed electric wire fencing along the perimeter wall of the Parliament Complex; introduction of Proper Control Access System for vehicles; creation of Central Command Station to look after the operation of all the newly installed technical gadgets; and the establishment of the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Pilot Project.

The functioning of Parliament and its effectiveness as the people's highest representative body are dependent upon appropriate back-up at the Secretariat level. A comprehensive Cadre Review of the Lok Sabha Secretariat Service was undertaken at the Hon'ble Speaker's initiative with a view to re-assessing the manpower requirement, effective deployment, charting improved career prospects and upgrading functional efficiency, transparency and accountability. As Speaker, Shri Chatterjee delegated administrative and financial powers to empower the administrative apparatus of the Secretariat and foster efficacious decentralization. A Grievance Redressal Mechanism was set up in 2005 to enable staff to ventilate and resolve their service related problems. A new recruitment process at par with the examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission to attract youngsters across the country and a transfer policy for the staff has also been initiated. Similarly, special emphasis has been laid on training and officers are now regularly sent for the best available training in institutions of repute across the country. Under his visionary leadership, meritorious awards and financial assistance were initiated for the education of the outstanding students of Group C and D employees. Shri Somnath Chatterjee has been very concerned about the inadequate office space and limited number of residences for the employees of the Lok Sabha Secretariat. It is due to his initiatives that foundation stones for an extension to Parliament House Annexe and a new residential complex at R.K. Puram, New Delhi, were laid.

His Landmark Decisions

During his Speakership, Shri Somnath Chatterjee took several landmark decisions ranging from the larger constitutional issues to those that enhance the accountability and transparency in the functioning of the House of the People.

The system of parliamentary democracy clearly delineates the powers and functions of the three organs of the State – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. While discharging their respective roles of legislating, executing the law and interpreting the law, at times, under complex circumstances, one particular organ moves beyond its jurisdiction and infringes upon the other's, thereby jeopardizing the balance of powers. Shri Chatterjee, as the custodian of parliamentary rights and privileges, has diligently worked for maintaining the dignity and authority that Parliament wields under our constitutional framework. He has always stood for and defended the supremacy of Parliament. For him, maintaining a fine demarcation of power among the three organs of the State represents the very essence of our parliamentary democracy. He believes that in a democratic set up, the role and function of every institution is clearly mentioned in the Constitution and the institutions can effectively discharge their responsibilities without

trivializing the role of the coordinate institution. When the institutions function within the domain assigned to each, not only do they go up in public esteem, but they also create the ideal conditions for the effective functioning of the entire system.

A major development with a potential to disturb the delicate balance of power among the three organs of governance if allowed to go unchallenged, was responded to, by the guardian and the custodian of the House of the People, the Speaker, with all the firmness it deserved. When the dispute arose, over the decision of the Governor in appointing the Chief Minister in Jharkhand, a three-Judge bench of the Supreme Court passed an interim order which *inter alia* contained directions about fixing of agenda of the House, maintenance of order in the House and the video recordings of the proceedings of the House. These relate to such issues on which, under the Constitution and the rules and by Convention, decisions fall within the exclusive domain of the Presiding Officers of the Legislative Bodies. Shri Somnath Chatterjee, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha who is also the Chairman of the Conference of Presiding Officers, took serious note of the interim order of the Supreme Court on the issue. After consulting the Leaders of all the Parties in Parliament, the Speaker issued a statement in this regard. He called a one-day Emergency Conference of the Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India on 20 March 2005 to discuss the issue and the relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary. The Speaker felt that the interim order of the Supreme Court in the Jharkhand case disturbed the delicate balance of power between the Judiciary and the Legislature, which is one of the basic features of our Constitution, as decided by the Supreme Court itself. He stressed that the Legislature's supremacy, one of the cardinal principles of parliamentary democracy, as enshrined in the Constitution, should be clearly asserted. His views were fully endorsed by the Emergency Conference of the Presiding Officers through a unanimous resolution.

Another unprecedented decision in our parliamentary history, taken by Shri Somnath Chatterjee as Speaker, pertained to 'cash for query' case. On 23 December 2005, ten members involved in the cash for query case were expelled by the House from the membership of the Lok Sabha after the matter was investigated by an *ad hoc* Inquiry Committee consisting of members from all sections of the House and a recommendation made to this effect in their Report to the House. These expelled members subsequently filed writ petitions in the Supreme Court challenging their expulsion. The Apex Court directed that notices be issued to all the parties, including the Speaker Lok Sabha. Shri Chatterjee, however, decided that the Secretariat would not accept any such notice, far less respond to the same as in his view the issue was non-justiciable since the Constitution provides, *inter alia*, that votes given

by the members cannot be questioned in any judicial proceedings and that the House had full right and facility to deal with all matters regarding discipline and misconduct of the members. The decision taken by Shri Chatterjee was unanimously supported by the All Party Meeting of the Leaders as well as the Emergency Conference of the Presiding Officers held on 4 February 2006. In a subsequent development, the Supreme Court *vide* their judgement delivered on 10 January 2007 dismissed the writ petitions filed by the expelled members and upheld the right of the Legislatures to take disciplinary action against the members but also held that in some given areas, the Courts may intervene with the decision of the Legislatures.

In another important decision by Shri Chatterjee as the Presiding Officer, four members of Parliament who allegedly indulged in improper conduct in the matter of implementation of Member of Parliament Local Area Development (MPLAD) Scheme, were suspended from the membership of the House for a certain period and it was recommended to the Government to suitably revise the guidelines governing the MPLAD Scheme with a view to plugging its loopholes and lacunae.

In April 2007, some members were accused of various misdemeanours. Shri Chatterjee strongly felt that these instances greatly tarnish the prestige and image of the supreme representative institution and condemned the conduct of the members. At his initiative, an eleven-member Committee of the members of Lok Sabha was constituted to inquire *inter alia* into the instances of misconduct of members of Lok Sabha, including misuse of parliamentary privileges and facilities by them, and also to look into the desirability of defining what Acts would amount to misconduct on the part of the member. On a recommendation made by this Inquiry Committee in their First Report, the House adopted a motion suspending a member for a stipulated period for misuse by him of his official Air Journey and wilfully suppressing truth from the Committee and giving false evidence before the Committee. The Committee, in their Second Report recommended a broad framework of Code of Conduct for members of Lok Sabha. On a recommendation made by the Inquiry Committee in their Third Report, the House expelled yet another member for commission of grave act of misconduct and contempt of the Committee as well as of the House.

Shri Chatterjee's reasoned and considered decisions regarding expulsion of members under the anti-defection law, strictly adhering to higher principles of the Tenth Schedule, have also been admirable. His conduct of the proceedings of the House during the Trust Vote of 21-22 July 2008 evoked tremendous appreciation from a cross section of citizens from India and abroad.

Shri Somnath Chatterjee—The Legend

Shri Somnath Chatterjee, is a multifaceted personality with varied interests that range from education, law and constitutional matters to theatres, films and sports. He is a modern man, rooted in ideology but wedded to pragmatism. Shri Chatterjee combines an unwavering commitment to certain basic principles and values with a rare ability to reach across the political divide.

Shri Chatterjee is actively associated with a large number of socio-cultural, educational and professional institutions and trade unions. Through all these organizations, he is engaged in constructive activities, such as the uplift of the deprived and the downtrodden, eradication of illiteracy, improvement in educational policies, etc. Shri Chatterjee is an ardent champion of the genuine rights of the working class. He believes in giving equal importance to industrial and agricultural sectors and hence works hard for the advancement of both. He has been Chairman of the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation and has visited many countries in search of possible investment in the State. He has also been associated with a significant number of organizations rendering service in areas of civil liberties, academics, arts and sports. A keen sports enthusiast, he loves watching sports events and is associated with several sports organizations and clubs. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Mohan Bagan Athletic Club, Cricket Association of Bengal, the Bengal Table Tennis Association, etc.

His favourite pastime and recreation include reading, gardening and watching sports events. He has also contributed articles on several themes like *Parliament and the People, Six Decades of Parliamentary Democracy, Procedural Initiatives in Indian Parliament, Democracy and Judiciary, Parliament and the Role of Media* in various journals and newspapers.

A highly accomplished lawyer, a trade unionist, an active and articulate parliamentarian, an erudite leader and now the Speaker of the world's largest democracy, Shri Somnath Chatterjee is indeed a multi-faceted personality. He has always displayed great sensitivity and deep concern for the suffering masses as also various aspects of national development. A man of deep social and intellectual sensitivity, Shri Chatterjee has spared no effort to give a new direction to our polity and democracy. A right blend of head and heart, and propelled by a vision to steer clear of all the hurdles in the path of our democratic system of governance, he has never missed the opportunity in bringing to the fore the issues and concerns afflicting our country. It is because of his invaluable service to the nation especially in performing meticulously his onerous duty as a parliamentarian that he was conferred with the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award.

Throughout his public life, Shri Somnath Chatterjee has been instituting a sense of respect among our people in the institutions of democracy, and thereby sustaining the people's faith in them. Being acutely aware of the disenchantment of the common people with the imperfections in the system, he has been eager to correct them, constantly reminding those in Parliament of the growing cynicism and apathy among the people and that unless correctives are applied, the people would lose faith in the efficacy of parliamentary democracy as a system of governance. Shri Chatterjee has passionately tried to infuse into the working of the Lok Sabha greater transparency and accountability so as to restore its pre-eminence as the highest forum of the world's largest democracy.

PART II
HIS VIEWS

I

STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

LOK SABHA : PEOPLE'S INSTITUTION PAR EXCELLENCE*

Hon'ble members, I am extremely thankful to you for unanimously electing me to the high office of the Speaker of this august House. I do not have words adequately to express my feelings for the great honour bestowed on me and I accept the same with all humility and gratitude. I am overwhelmed by the generous sentiments expressed for me by all sections of the House.

Today I cannot help remembering the day when I first entered this great Chamber in the year 1971 as a new member and I must confess that I was overawed in the presence of giants and luminaries who added great lustre to the proceedings of the House. As a back bencher, I had the opportunity to listen to some of the great orations inside the House which inspired me to be worthy of the confidence reposed by the people by electing me to the House. I cannot also forget witnessing from the Visitors' Gallery on occasions the proceedings in the House when my father, late Shri N.C. Chatterjee, was one of the members. I had the great privilege of hearing some of the most inspiring interventions by, amongst others, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Pandit Pant, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Shri N. C. Chatterjee, Prof. Hiren Mukerjee, Shri Nath Pai and many others. Please excuse me for the nostalgic feeling that I have on this occasion.

I am also grateful to the hon'ble Prime Minister for his kind reference to my father. I find his award of degree to him was well justified and he has more than proved his merit, and today I must congratulate him once again for occupying this position of high honour.

Hon'ble members, the Fourteenth Lok Sabha has got the people's mandate to usher in a new era. This is a unique responsibility bestowed on this august House. Our country has made progress in various fields since Independence. However, a lot more needs to be done for the benefit of the common people. We have to ensure that the creative potential and energies of our people are harnessed for fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of various sections of our society, particularly the deprived and the dispossessed, by providing a developing, pro-people and secular administration.

*On the floor of the House, after assuming office as the Speaker of Lok Sabha (4 June 2004).

Lok Sabha is the highest elected body in the largest parliamentary democracy in the world and occupies the pivotal position in our political system. Our founding fathers, after considerable deliberations, decided to adopt the parliamentary system of governance with the Lok Sabha elected on adult franchise and the Council of Ministers responsible to the same. The people of India participate in the parliamentary process through their representatives in Lok Sabha. Members of Parliament who are elected on the basis of their pledge contained in their manifestoes are expected to articulate the urges and aspirations of the people, to discuss problems and issues facing the nation and to deliberate upon the formulation of national policies and programmes with a view to finding solutions to them. The very postulate of parliamentary democracy as is enshrined in our Constitution is the collective responsibility of Central Council of Ministers to the House of People. For every action of the Government, it is liable to answer in this House.

This House represents all sections of our people with their very socio-cultural identities, ethos and genius, differences of ideas, interests, approaches and objectives as they are bound to arise during the deliberations in the House. As a strong integrating force in the country, this House, which is the people's institution in the true sense of the term is called upon to resolve the various socio-political and economic problems faced by the people.

Even after more than five decades of Independence, in the course of which we have celebrated the Golden Jubilee of our Parliament, a very substantial number of our people still face awesome problems and do not enjoy even the minimum rights which the Constitution, our organic law contemplates for them. Abysmal poverty, illiteracy, high child mortality, absence of adequate healthcare, lack of job opportunities, non-availability of pure drinking water in many areas, amongst others, are the problems which still haunt the common people and resulted in effective denial of the constitutional, and indeed, the basic human rights to our people.

The common people of our country, particularly the toiling sections, the workers, the peasants and the farmers, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, the women and the minorities have not been able to fulfil their minimum needs. The condition of the working class in the country is still extremely uncertain with mounting unemployment figures. In such circumstances, I humbly feel that it is the bounden duty of us all, as members of Parliament, to play a very active, responsible and effective role to meet the aspirations of the people.

The Parliament is constituted by the people. It has to deliberate upon and deal with the problems of the people and ultimately find their solutions for the people.

The Rules of Business and Procedure in Lok Sabha have been framed for the orderly conduct of its business and several avenues for obtaining redressal of the people's grievances have also been provided in the rules. My appeal to all the hon'ble members is to utilise these rules in a proper manner so that they can play an effective role as members of this august House.

Nowadays considerable criticism is being faced by the members of Parliament about their failure to maintain decorum and dignity in the House. The behaviour and conduct of some legislators have become subject of justified criticism, and in some cases, even of ridicule. Unfortunately, there is developing more and more an attitude of confrontation than cooperation in our political life which finds its reflection in the House. We should resolve to change this perception in the minds of the people by our own conduct, both inside and outside the House.

Hon'ble members, I am fully conscious of the responsibility bestowed on me as the Speaker of this august House. The willing co-operation you have promised today on the floor of the House gives the strength to shoulder the great responsibility and prove myself worthy of the trust you have reposed in me. Conscious as I am of the responsibility that has been entrusted, I can assure you that I shall always endeavour to conduct the business of this House in keeping with the lofty ideals and noble goals enshrined in our great Constitution and in the Rules of Procedure and in tune with the highest parliamentary traditions.

I am fully aware that as the Speaker, my conduct and behaviour will always be under close scrutiny. Maintaining the high standards laid down by the distinguished predecessors starting from Shri Vithalbhai Patel, Shri G.V. Mavalankar up to Shri Manohar Joshi, I shall spare no effort to uphold and, if possible, further enhance the dignity and prestige of this high constitutional office in regulating the proceedings of this House and addressing the concerns of its members.

I shall discharge my functions entrusted to this office more as a duty rather than as an authority. The non-party character of the office of the Speaker in our parliamentary polity places on me a special obligation to be totally non-partisan and judicious while regulating the proceedings of the House. So long as I occupy this exalted Chair, I assure you that I shall always strive to protect to the best of my ability the rights and privileges of the House and of its members irrespective of their political affiliations.

Hon'ble members, I can assure you that to me, all the hon'ble members are of the same status and are entitled to the same facilities, irrespective of the party to which one may belong, and will be entitled to the same opportunity. The only status that I recognise is that all of you are elected and hon'ble members of this great institution.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had observed at a Seminar on Parliamentary Democracy held on 6 December 1957 that:

> Deliberately and after long argument, we in India adopted a Constitution based on parliamentary Government. We praise the parliamentary form of Government because it is a peaceful method of dealing with problems. It is a method of agreement, discussion, decision and accepting the decision even though one may or may not agree with it.

Parliament should function through debate, discussion and consensus and it can only do so if the deliberations are marked by a sense of commitment to the cause of the people and the atmosphere in the House is kept free from bitterness and acrimony. Unless the rules, regulations and well-established parliamentary conventions are respected by each and every member and unless the members exhibit mutual accommodation and respect whenever there are differing points of view, our parliamentary democracy will remain imperfect. The Treasury Benches and the Opposition have equal responsibilities in ensuring good governance in the country. While discharging their parliamentary responsibilities, both sides are expected to be accommodating and forbearing to each other, particularly when contentious issues are debated on the floor of the House.

A member of Parliament occupies a very high place in the eyes of the people. The effectiveness of the functioning of this House would depend to a great extent on how scrupulously we, the members follow various rules and guidelines which are a prerequisite for the orderly transaction of parliamentary business. Here, I need hardly emphasise that the observance of discipline and decorum on the part of the members is an essential precondition for the smooth and efficient functioning of the House. Besides the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business, there exist numerous customs and conventions, rules of parliamentary etiquette and unrecorded traditions, which have to be observed by every member in the interest of parliamentary decorum. It is the quality of our behaviour and the substance of our deliberations that will decide whether we are able to enhance the prestige of this august House and promote faith in our parliamentary institution.

With many young faces making their debut in the Lok Sabha in the just concluded General Elections, this House has the benefit of utilising a pool of constructive energies together with experience of the senior members in responding to the issues concerning the hopes and aspirations of the common masses.

I hope every newly elected member will function with commitment and learn and follow the rules of the game and make valuable contributions to

the proceedings of the House. May I suggest the newcomers to get themselves conversant with the established parliamentary traditions and conventions and learn to make full use of all their valuable procedural devices so that they may contribute effectively towards redressal of the people's grievances.

The role of the media in providing an effective interface between the people and the Parliament cannot be overemphasised. I am fully confident that a responsible and adequate coverage of the proceedings of the House by the media will go a long way in projecting the right image of the supreme national forum. I seek a meaningful cooperation from the media.

I am grateful to the hon'ble members for their warm expressions about me and for assuring me, their unstinted cooperation. I express my grateful thanks to the hon'ble Prime Minister; hon'ble Leader of the House; Smt. Sonia Gandhi; Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee; hon'ble Leader of the Opposition, Shri L. K. Advani; Leaders of various Parties; and other distinguished friends for the warm sentiments they have expressed about me. To run the House successfully, I look forward to your cooperation. On my part, let me assure you once again that I shall endeavour my best to justify the trust that you have reposed in me to meet your expectations.

Let us all join our hands in heralding a new era of peace, progress and prosperity for our country through the discharge of our duty as the chosen representatives of the people. I earnestly seek your kind cooperation and help in the discharge of my onerous duty.

As a Leftist, as one belonging to the Left Party, friends on my Left may be rest assured that I have a natural leaning towards the Left. Let us resolve that we shall perform the task assigned to us to the best of our ability and with sincerity. We should ask ourselves when the House rises for the day every evening as to what we have done during the day for the country and for the people and whether we have justified the people's faith in sending us here. Nothing will give us more satisfaction than the feeling that we have tried and done our best.

Thank you very much.

LEGISLATORS : TRUSTEES OF THE PEOPLE*

I am happy to welcome you all to this Orientation Programme organized by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training of the Lok Sabha Secretariat. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate all of you on your election to the 14th Lok Sabha. The mandate that you have received from the people of India enjoins upon you to vigorously strive for the socio-economic progress of our people, particularly the weaker sections of our society.

The BPST has been organizing such Orientation Programmes for members of Parliament and State Legislatures with the objective of providing to the members the important facets of the functioning of our parliamentary system. It is extremely important that the members should equip themselves with the provisions of rules, conventions and practices and the opportunities available, which should be utilized to enable them to function effectively and efficiently.

During the Orientation Programme, you will have an opportunity to listen to and exchange views with many distinguished parliamentarians on several subjects of parliamentary interest. I am sure that this programme will greatly benefit you by providing scope for interaction with experienced members and experts.

Only recently did we all come through the gigantic process of yet another General Election in the country. The very process of the election itself would have impressed upon you the enormity of the responsibility we all are called upon to discharge. Being a representative of the people is not about the powers and privileges that go with it. It is a very demanding and challenging job. It is as challenging as each one of us take it to be. What is important is to have a realistic role perception and work tirelessly to fulfil that perceived role.

Our Parliament, which represents different shades of public opinion, remains the supreme forum for active participation in the democratic process. It is the corner-stone around which the Indian polity revolves. It is indeed a great honour to be a member of Parliament, especially in a developing country like ours wherein Parliament has to function as an agent of change.

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* At the inauguration of the Orientation Programme for the newly-elected members of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, organised by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST) of the Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi (18 August 2004).

In my perception, today a member of Parliament, and for that matter leaders as a whole, has to work twice as hard, as compared to the situation two decades back, to impress and win over the confidence of the people. Our common masses are becoming increasingly cynical about the political class. They have many unfulfilled dreams which they had expected our political system to address. While agreeing that it is difficult to satisfy everyone, we have to ask ourselves, "are we conducting ourselves in a manner befitting the stature of this great institution of Parliament and as the trustees of our people ?"

We should always bear in mind the fact that a legislator is a representative and the leader of the people at one and the same time. As a representative, he must reflect the hopes, aspirations, dreams and, even the nightmares of the people! As leaders, we all are expected to be role models for our people. The image that our people will have of our Parliament is the aggregate image of the performance and conduct of each of us as individual members.

A member of Parliament is entrusted with enormous responsibilities. He has to perform a wide variety of roles and discharge several functions, both inside and outside the House. How successful a parliamentarian is, depends ultimately on how well he or she is able to categorise priorities and then fulfil his or her obligations to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Friends, as you all know, under our system of governance, there is no institution greater than the Parliament. The extent of the effectiveness and efficiency with which the Legislature functions would be dependent on how seriously each one of us takes our parliamentary work and how we conduct ourselves as legislators. To be an effective parliamentarian calls for various personal attributes on a member's part-knowledge, hard work and capacity to utilize available opportunities in the House are only some of them. Members also ought to have impeccable character, great courage and virtuous conduct.

Do not attempt to speak on every subject that comes up before the House. Try to develop some kind of subject specialization, so that you will be in a better position to make meaningful contribution on the floor of the House when discussions on the subjects of your interest take place in the House. I would also like to advise my friends here that they should make a distinction between a speech on the floor of the House and a political speech on a public platform. A speech in the House should be focused, should be supported by facts and figures, should throw more light on the issues being discussed and should be guided by public interest.

What members, especially new members, have to keep in mind is that regular attendance in the House by itself provides a great opportunity for learning. They can, by observing senior members, learn the nuances of

legislative functioning and in course of time, will be able to develop the art of making a distinction between what is important and what is not. This would help them in raising issues in the House in a proper manner.

Friends, we are living in an information-driven world order—the better informed you are the more powerful you become. Members should try to develop the habit of coming well-prepared to the House with relevant and up-to-date information on the subject on which they intend to speak, rather than to jump into the well of the House, at the earliest opportunity! We have, perhaps, one of the best libraries in the country and a dedicated team of staff manning it. Try to take advantage of it by making the best use of it. You are always welcome to come up with suggestions to facilitate even better services for our members. I believe that only through informed representatives can we produce an informed population which is the greatest asset for any democracy.

In the true democratic spirit, members should be good listeners too. If you do not listen to differing views and perceptions on issues, your democratic credentials will be suspect. Don't ever forget that democracy is a system of alternatives—of alternative parties, alternative policies, alternative principles, alternative approaches and alternative leaders. In a democracy, today's Opposition Party could be tomorrow's Ruling Party and *vice versa*. This fact enjoins upon us that we have to display a very high degree of tolerance of other people, parties, religions, views and principles. Tolerance is the basic tenet of democracy. Parliamentary democracy has a very high tradition of tolerance and resilience. It has a history of allowing even extreme hard line ideologies to flourish under its umbrella and still remain unscathed and accepted as the most preferred system of governance across the world.

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, in one of his renowned expositions in the Lok Sabha, had observed:

> Parliamentary democracy demands many virtues. It demands a certain devotion to work. But it demands also a large measure of cooperation, of self-discipline, of self-restraint. It is obvious that a House like this cannot perform any functions without a spirit of cooperation, without a large measure of restraint and self-discipline in each group.

Members should also take keen interest in the Committee work, which provide for meaningful participation in the parliamentary business. Committee work is as important as the work in the House. This is particularly important since we now have an elaborate system of Departmentally-Related Standing Committees of which you all are members by now. These Committees provide you opportunities to understand better how our machinery of Government, particularly the various departments, function and to make your own

contributions at different stages. Every effort should be made to utilize the available opportunities in the House and in the Committees by making the best use of the rules. A thorough understanding of the rules of procedure, conventions and customs of the House, directions from the Chair, and above all, the fundamental law of the land—our Constitution, will be an enviable asset in a member.

In a parliamentary polity, the observance of discipline and decorum on the part of the parliamentarians is an essential prerequisite for the smooth and efficient functioning of the Legislature. The greatness of our Parliament does not lie just in its majestic building. It is derived from and sustained by the quality of debates that take place inside it and the traditions of discipline and decorum that we set. Its greatness is determined by how progressive are the laws that it enacts and how fruitful are the discussions that it holds on various subjects and how they benefit the people and help in shaping the destiny of the nation.

I would also appeal to you, not because I am the Speaker, but because of the nature of the responsibilities entrusted to the Presiding Officer, to respect the authority of the Chair. Otherwise, the Presiding Officer cannot conduct the proceedings in an orderly manner. I believe that free debate, objective deliberations and healthy criticisms are the very life and strength of representative democracy. As the Presiding Officer, it is my endeavour to promote these objectives. One great responsibility is to conduct ourselves as examples for the society at large. We cannot afford to ignore the feelings and perceptions of the common man. His perception is the most important imponderable for the sustenance of a democratic polity. Winston Churchill stressed this point when he said:

> At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man walking into the little booth with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper. No amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussions can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of that point.

Friends, as elected representatives of the people, we are trustees of the people and the custodians of the nation's heritage. Together, we are privileged to steer our nation to a brighter and more prosperous 21st Century. There are bound to be differing perceptions and different approaches to tackling situations and resolving difficulties. Yet, even while we give expression to our feelings on the floor of the House, let us resolve that our actions are confined to what are sanctioned by the rules and procedures which we ourselves have framed for the orderly conduct of business.

I hope you all would discharge your duties as parliamentarians with devotion and commitment and conduct yourselves as examples to be emulated by others. I am all the more impressed about the present Lok Sabha for the presence of so many young and promising members. Our people are looking forward to them with hope, to give a new orientation and to create a new image about our institutions of governance. I am sure, among you will be found brilliant and devoted parliamentarians, Ministers, leaders and statesmen of tomorrow who would enhance the rich traditions and values of our great country.

With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate this Orientation Programme. I hope, it will be a highly rewarding experience for each one of you and I wish the programme all success.

Thank you.

DEVELOPMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES*

It is a matter of great pleasure and honour for me to be here with you and to join our hosts in welcoming you all to this great city of Kolkata and to the Conference of the Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India. It gives me added pleasure to welcome you to a State which I have been representing in Lok Sabha right since 1971. Going by her remarkable history, culture and heritage, I am sure you will all agree that the State of West Bengal occupies a pre-eminent position in our nation's millennia old history. The people of the State were not only in the forefront of the country's freedom struggle but also made valuable contributions to the making of modern India. West Bengal has produced a galaxy of eminent personalities in the fields of science, literature and theatre. It is also known for its pioneering social reformers. It has produced literary giants like Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore, apart from many others. Our National Song and National Anthem—the symbols of our national identity in the world, as also the perennial sources of inspiration to millions of our people—are the creations of these two great literary figures.

As you all know, this Conference was earlier scheduled to be held at Patna in February 2004 but owing to the general elections in the country, it was postponed. Kolkata has the proud privilege of having been the venue of a similar Conference in 1984 as well.

Kolkata is a historic city, assimilating in it the glory of the past and modernity of the present. Kolkata has been the home or the place of work of all Nobel laureates—Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest poets ever born; Mother Teresa, the apostle of peace, love and humanity; and Amartya Sen, a visionary economist and thinker, Sir Ronald Ross and Sir C.V. Raman, the greatest scientists, also did their work here. The city is synonymous with intellectualism and human values and is known as the Cultural Capital of India. Needless to say, this historic city and indeed the whole West Bengal, with its rich tradition of culture, language and literature provides the ideal environment for our deliberations. I am sure that this Conference will provide

* At the inauguration of the 67th Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, Kolkata (9 October 2004).

us an opportunity to experience the traditional warmth, simplicity, and hospitality of the people of West Bengal.

Friends, before I proceed further, I deem it my sad duty to refer to the passing away of some of our esteemed colleagues, who at one time or the other, belonged to the family of Presiding Officers. They are: Shri Nissanker Rao Venkataratnam, former Speaker, Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly; Shri Abdul Gafur, former Chairman, Bihar Vidhan Parishad; Shri Korambayil Ahammed Haji, former Deputy Speaker, Kerala Legislative Assembly; Shri Ram Kishor Shukla, former Speaker, Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha; Shri Brijmohan Mishra, former Speaker, Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha; Thiru V.P. Balasubramanian, former Deputy Speaker, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, Shri A.M. Thomas, former Speaker, Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly and Shri Shiv Prasad Gupta, former Chairman, Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Parishad. I pay my respectful homage to their memory.

As you are aware, I assumed the Office of the Speaker of Lok Sabha on 4 June 2004 and I have the honour of being unanimously elected to this august office. As the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, through this forum, I take the opportunity to look forward to interacting with my fellow Presiding Officers from all over the country. After the previous Conference in Mumbai in February 2003, as many as 34 distinguished personalities have joined the family of Presiding Officers. They include my esteemed colleague in Lok Sabha, Sardar Charnjit Singh Atwal, the Deputy Speaker and Shri K. Rahman Khan, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha. Both of them are well-known parliamentarians and need no introduction. On behalf of all of you and on my own behalf, I extend a hearty welcome to each one of them on their joining our fraternity. I welcome them heartily to this very important Conference. I also place on record our appreciation of the valuable contributions made to our Conferences by those colleagues who have earlier been the Presiding Officers.

Friends, since the last Conference, we have had three Sessions of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, and after the recent General Elections, we have had two Sessions of the newly-constituted Fourteenth Lok Sabha.

Subsequent to the dissolution of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha in February, 2004, elections for the constitution of a new House, were held in April-May in different phases. In these elections, the Indian voters, as usual, have exhibited their maturity. Needless to say, the recent elections have once again reaffirmed our peoples' firm commitment to parliamentary democracy.

The Twelfth Session of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, popularly known as the Budget Session, commenced on 17 February 2003 with the Address of the Hon'ble President to the members of both the Houses and concluded on

9 May 2003. The Thirteenth Session of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha which began on 21 July 2003 concluded on 22 August 2003 and was quite turbulent.

One of the issues that rocked the House and led to disruption of the proceedings during the Thirteenth Session was the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on Review of Procurement for Operation Vijay, presented to the House on 6 August 2003. The Report was unique inasmuch as the PAC, for the first time, expressed their inability to give their findings on the C&AG's Report under their examination as the Ministry of Defence had declined to furnish the Report of the Central Vigilance Commission on defence transactions to the Committee on the ground that it would be prejudicial to the interests of the State.

Issues relating to the PAC Report subsequently also became one of the reference points for the No-Confidence Motion moved by the then Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Smt. Sonia Gandhi, on 18 August 2003. The discussion on No-Confidence Motion lasted for more than 21 hours and at around midnight on 19 August 2003, the House divided and the Motion was negatived.

The Fourteenth Session of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, which turned out to be its last Session, was convened in two parts. The first part of the Session began on 2 December 2003 and concluded on 23 December 2003 and the second part commenced after a gap of 36 days on 29 January 2004 specially to pass the Vote-on-Account for the first four months of the year 2004-2005 and ended on 5 February 2004.

The validity and propriety of convening the second part of the Session in the new calendar year 2004, subsequent to the *sine die* adjournment of the House on 23 December 2003, without the President's Address to both the Houses, as prescribed under article 87 of the Constitution, became an issue of contention during the Session. Holding that a Session comes to an end only when the House is prorogued, the then Speaker ruled that he was treating the sittings of the House convened from 29 January 2004 to 5 February 2004 as a continuum, or the second part of the Fourteenth Session of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, notwithstanding the fact that the calendar year had since changed. Subsequently the issue was taken to the Supreme Court which admitted a writ petition by a member and the same is still pending with the Court.

Friends, as you all know, the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, constituted on 10 October 1999, was dissolved on 6 February 2004. In all, it held 14 Sessions, spreading over nearly 52 months consisting of 356 sittings lasting over 1945 hours.

Following the General Elections, the Fourteenth Lok Sabha was constituted on 17 May 2004. It saw a change of Government with the Treasury Benches being occupied by the Indian National Congress-led United Progressive Alliance and Dr. Manmohan Singh sworn in as the Thirteenth Prime Minister of the country on 22 May 2004. The composition of the new House has seen a shift towards youth and fresh blood with as many as 227 members being first timers in the Lok Sabha. I hope these newly elected members, and particularly, the young ones in different parties will contribute positively in the strengthening of our parliamentary democracy.

The First Session of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha which commenced on 2 June 2004 came to an end on 10 June 2004. The first two sittings of the new House were mainly devoted to the members making and subscribing the oath or affirmation. On 4 June 2004, as mentioned earlier, I had the honour of having been elected unanimously as the Speaker of the House. In my reply to the felicitations, I expressed my sincere gratitude to the House for the honour bestowed upon me and said:

> I am fully conscious of the responsibility bestowed on me as Speaker of this august House. The willing cooperation you have promised today on the floor of the House gives me the strength to shoulder the great responsibility and prove myself worthy of the trust you have reposed in me. Conscious as I am of the responsibility that has been entrusted, I can assure you that I shall always endeavour to conduct the business of this House in keeping with the lofty ideals and noble goals enshrined in our great Constitution and in the Rules of Procedure and in tune with the highest parliamentary traditions.....I am grateful to the Hon'ble members for their warm expressions about me and for assuring me their unstinted cooperation. On my part, let me assure you once again that I shall endeavour my best to justify the trust that you have reposed in me and meet your expectations.

My colleague, Sardar Charnjit Singh Atwal was also elected unanimously as the Deputy Speaker of the House on 9 June 2004.

As is customary, on the occasion of the first Session of the new Lok Sabha, the President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam addressed the members of both the Houses of Parliament in the Central Hall of Parliament on 7 June 2004. The Motion of Thanks on the President's Address could not be fully discussed due to interruptions in the House and was put to the vote on 10 June 2004, as a result of understanding reached among the political parties on both sides.

The Second Session, which was the first Budget Session of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, commenced on 5 July 2004. The Railway and the General Budgets

for the year 2004-05 were presented on 6 and 8 July 2004, respectively. The House went on recess from 26 July 2004 to 13 August 2004 to enable the Standing Committees to examine and report on the Demands for Grants of various Ministries and Departments. These Committees, despite severe time constraints, performed commendably and presented as many as 38 Reports to the House.

Friends, it was a matter of regret for me that the Railway as well as the Demands for Grants in respect of the General Budget and Finance Bill, 2004 had to be passed without any discussion owing to the continued interruptions and forced adjournments of the House. There have been two such instances in the past when financial business had to be passed without discussion. First, it was in 1991 when after the resignation of the Council of Ministers, the interim Railway and General Budgets and the Budgets in respect of the States of Punjab, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir and the Union territory of Pondicherry for the year 1991-92 were passed without discussion on 11 March 1991. In the second instance, in 1999, after the defeat of the Confidence Motion on the floor of the House, the Demands for Grants relating to the Railway and the General Budgets 1999-2000 were voted without discussion on 22 April 1999.

But this year's passing of financial business was unusual inasmuch as it was necessitated due to a stalemate that arose as a result of continued interruptions in the House. The House, originally scheduled to have 30 sittings, prematurely concluded on 26 August 2004, abandoning six precious days of sittings. During the remaining days of actual sitting too, we lost over 47 hours of valuable time due to disorderly scenes resulting in forced adjournments of the House. Most disturbingly, on as many as seven days of the Session, the business transacted by the House was almost negligible. All my sincere and humble efforts to break the impasse and ensure the smooth and orderly functioning of the business of the House were of no avail.

It is a serious matter. I have requested the Leaders of all parties to ponder over this matter and find a solution to the problem. In this connection, I have convened a joint meeting of the Leaders, Deputy Leaders and Whips of parties of both the Houses on 8 November 2004, to discuss the ways and means, and if possible, evolve a code of conduct for ensuring the effective functioning of Parliament. The respected Chairman of Rajya Sabha has kindly consented to preside over the same. I sincerely hope that the collective wisdom of the Leaders will act as a guiding force in the effective functioning of Parliament in the days to come.

Friends, I would now like to recapitulate some of the significant developments of parliamentary interest that have taken place since our last

Conference held in February 2003 in Mumbai. On 7 and 24 April 2003, Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, MP gave notices of question of privilege against Shri Amit Shah, Home Minister, Government of Gujarat for a misleading statement allegedly made by Shri Shah. Shri Paswan in his notices of question of privilege alleged that as reported in *'The Hindu'* dated 11 March 2003, Shri Amit Shah had made a misleading press statement about him stating that a survey had been conducted on the Christian Community in the Gujarat State at local level as part of an answer to a question raised in the Lok Sabha by Shri Paswan in connection with the Anti-Conversion Bill. Shri Paswan contended that at no time had he raised any question in the Lok Sabha about the Christian Community in Gujarat or regarding conducting of any survey on them in Gujarat. He alleged that such a statement by the Home Minister of Gujarat was not only misleading but also politically motivated to malign him. The member also raised the matter during 'Zero Hour' on 9 and 21 April 2003. On 24 April 2003, when Shri Paswan sought to raise the matter in the House, the then Speaker, Shri Manohar Joshi gave the following ruling:—

> I have received your notices of question of privilege dated 7th and 24th April 2003 against the Home Minister, Government of Gujarat for his alleged misleading statement against you in the Press. As you are aware, the Home Minister of Gujarat, against whom the notices of question of privilege are directed, is a member of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly. It is well established that one House cannot claim or exercise any authority over a member of the other House.
>
> I have accordingly, referred the matter to the Hon'ble Speaker, Gujarat Legislative Assembly for appropriate action in the matter under intimation to me.
>
> On 24 June, 2003, Secretary-in-charge, Gujarat Legislative Assembly addressed a letter to the Secretary-General, Lok Sabha, informing that Shri Amit Shah, Minister of State in his explanation had stated that he had not given any information to any PTI reporter regarding survey of the Christian Community in the State. He had further stated that he had neither given any appointment to any press reporter nor had he issued any press report in this regard. The news regarding the survey of the Christian community published in his name under daily *'The Hindu'* is misleading and baseless. From the reply of Shri Amit Shah, it seemed that he had not made any statement regarding the survey of the Christian Community in Gujarat to any press reporter or media. Hon'ble Speaker, Gujarat Legislative Assembly was of the opinion that there was no *prima facie* case of breach of privilege, and as such, no further action was required to be taken in this matter.

The matter was, therefore, treated as closed.

In another case, on 24 April 2003, Sarvashri Ramji Lal Suman, Toofani Saroj, Raghunath Jha, Ram Rati Bind and Kunwar Akhilesh Singh, MPs gave notices of question of privilege against Kum. Mayawati, the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for having cast aspersions on the House. The members in their notices stated that on 21 April 2003 immediately after the House met, the members made submissions on the matter regarding alleged framing of charges against the leader of the Samajwadi Party and others in Uttar Pradesh over which members of all sections of the House desired that a Code of Conduct for Chief Ministers of States be laid down. The members contended that the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh reacting to the views expressed by members in the House, had stated that 'Sampoorna Lok Sabha Manuwadi Pravarti se grast hai' (The entire Lok Sabha is afflicted with manuwadi trait). The members alleged that such remarks by Kum. Mayawati constituted contempt of the House. When Shri Ramji Lal Suman raised the matter in the House on 28 April 2003 during 'Zero Hour', the then Speaker gave the following ruling:-

> I have received notices of question of privilege from Sarvashri Ramji Lal Suman, Toofani Saroj, Raghunath Jha, Ram Rati Bind and Kunwar Akhilesh Singh, members of Parliament against Kum. Mayawati, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, for committing a contempt of the House.
>
> As you are aware, Kum. Mayawati, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh against whom notices of question of privilege are directed, is a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly.
>
> It is well established that one House cannot claim or exercise any authority over a member of the other House.
>
> I am, accordingly, referring the matter to the Hon'ble Speaker, Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly for appropriate action in the matter under intimation to us.
>
> The Speaker, Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly *vide* his letter dated 23 July 2003 stated that Kum. Mayawati, the then Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh had sent him a copy of her reported press note dated 21 April 2003 on the basis of which the members had given notices of question of privilege and after perusing the same, he came to conclusion that there was neither any breach of privilege of any member nor contempt of the House by her. As the members had also not supported their allegations against her, he had not accepted notices of question of privilege against her.

The matter was, thereafter, treated as closed.

Friends, it is well-known that Parliamentary Committees perform a pivotal role in a parliamentary democracy. These Committees have been rightly recognised as a powerful instrument in strengthening not only the parliamentary process but also the accountability mechanisms. We have evolved a network of Parliamentary Committees to ensure Executive accountability. Though, various Committees have been functioning within the framework of their defined mandate, sometimes due to jurisdictional overlapping in their functioning, the desired results could not be achieved. It was therefore, thought appropriate to examine the entire gamut of issues so as to further strengthen the Committee System. You may recall that a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) under the Chairmanship of Shri Pranab Mukherjee was constituted in 2000 for the purpose. In its Report, presented on 26 July 2001, the JPC had recommended the restructuring of the Committee System. On its recommendations, while a few Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs) were bifurcated to constitute separate committees to deal with distinct subjects, a few were newly created. As a result, the number of DRSCs now has been increased from 17 to 24, while the strength of each of these Committees has been reduced from 45 to 31 members. The restructuring of the Committee System is intended to bring about an improvement in the examination and scrutiny of the Demands for Grants of the Ministries and Departments. I am sure, it would in the long run, ensure effective parliamentary scrutiny of the Executive as envisaged in our Constitutional scheme.

Another major development relates to the timely implementation of recommendations made by the Departmentally Related Standing Committees. Making concrete and pointed recommendations by the DRSCs is an essential adjunct to the interface between the Committees and the concerned Ministry/ Department falling under their jurisdiction. But unless the recommendations are effectively implemented, the whole purpose behind the exercise is defeated. Therefore, I felt that there was need for making a provision in the Rules/ Directions to ensure that the concerned Ministers give due importance and consideration to the timely implementation of the recommendations of DRSCs. Accordingly, a new Direction 73 A has been notified on 1 September 2004 providing that the Minister concerned shall make once in six months, a Statement in the House regarding the implementation of recommendations contained in the reports of the DRSCs of Lok Sabha with regard to his ministry. This new provision will be applicable to the Reports of DRSCs of Lok Sabha presented to the House from the 14th Lok Sabha onwards.

Another important development worth mentioning here relates to the direct telecast of the so-called 'Zero Hour' proceedings. On the eve of the

Budget Session, I had a meeting with the Leaders of all Parties and Groups in the House on 4 July 2004 where a consensus emerged on my proposal to allow live telecast of so-called 'Zero Hour' proceedings. The live telecast, I am sure, will bring transparency and accountability in the functioning of the House since the people have the right to know as to what their representatives are doing inside the House. As you may be aware, till now, the entire proceedings except that of 'Zero Hour' of the Lok Sabha were being telecast live through Low Power Transmitter having a range of 10 to 15 kms from Parliament House.

Friends, I would now like to make a mention of some important legislations the Parliament has enacted since we last met in Mumbai. First, I would like to mention about the Constitution Amendment Bills which have been passed by both the Houses and assented to by the President. Among the various legislations passed, the Constitution (Eighty-seventh Amendment) Act, 2003 provided for delimitation of constituencies of Lok Sabha and State Legislatures on the basis of 2001 census without affecting the total number of seats allotted to the House of the People or Legislative Assemblies. The Constitution (Eighty-eighth Amendment) Act, 2003 inserted a new article 268A which provides for taxes on services to be levied by the Union and collected and appropriated by the Union and States. A new entry '92 C. Taxes on Service' was also inserted in the Union List in the Seventh Schedule. The Constitution (Eighty-ninth Amendment) Act, 2003 amended article 338 to bifurcate the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes into two Commissions, namely, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution (Ninetieth Amendment) Act, 2003 amended article 332 so as to provide that for elections to the Legislative Assembly of the State of Assam, the representation of the Scheduled Tribes and non-scheduled Tribes in the constituencies included in the Bodoland Territorial Areas District, so notified, and existing prior to the constitution of Bodoland Territorial Areas District, shall be maintained.

The Constitution (Ninety-first Amendment) Act, 2003 recently enacted, represents a significant step towards curbing the evil of political defection in the Legislatures. The Act has *inter alia* provided, that the size of the Council of Ministers shall not be more than 15 per cent of the total number of members of the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly of a State, as the case may be. However, the number of Ministers, including the Chief Minister, in a State shall not be less than 12. The Act also omitted paragraph 3 of the Tenth Schedule. Paragraph 3 provides that a member shall not incur disqualification if he and any other members of his legislature party constitute a group representing a faction which has arisen as a result of split in his original political party and such group consists of not less than one-third of

the members of such legislature party. The Constitution (Ninety-second Amendment) Act, 2003 amended the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution so as to include Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali languages in the Schedule.

On the economic front, a landmark legislation was enacted, namely, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003 which laid down certain fiscal management principles for efficient fiscal management and to bring transparency in fiscal operations of the Central Government. The legislation also provides for laying in each financial year the three statements of fiscal policy, namely, the Medium-term Fiscal Statement, the Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement and the Macro-economic Framework Statement along with the Annual Financial Statement and the Demands for Grants.

This apart, the Members of Lok Sabha (Declaration of Assets and Liabilities) Rules, 2004, made by my predecessor in exercise of powers conferred upon him by sub-section (3) of Section 75A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 were laid on the Table of the Lok Sabha on 5 February 2004. As the Thirteenth Lok Sabha was dissolved on 6 February 2004, the Rules were laid afresh on the Table of the House by the Secretary-General, Lok Sabha on 10 June 2004. Upon the expiry of stipulated period of thirty days, the Rules came into force with effect from 4 August 2004.

This time two important Reports, one on 'Regulation of Zero Hour' and the other on 'Telecasting of Proceedings of the Legislatures' are being presented during the Conference. As you know, the so-called 'Zero Hour' is a unique Indian parliamentary practice. Through this device, the members, mainly from Opposition benches, assert their right to raise issues that are not listed in the agenda but which they feel to be of urgent public importance. Though the 'Zero Hour' has no legal sanctity under the Rules, it has, more or less, become a regular feature of the proceedings of the Houses of Parliament as well as the Legislatures in many States in India. It is noteworthy that about one-sixth of the total time of House is consumed by the 'Zero Hour' daily. In the course of time, it has emerged as a useful device for the purpose of ventilating public grievances of urgent nature but in the process, it often leads to commotion in the House which serves no purpose. Realising its importance and popularity, this issue has been taken up at several Presiding Officers' Conferences and also in the Conferences of Secretaries.

You all may recall that a Committee of Presiding Officers on 'Regulation of Zero Hour' was constituted at our previous Conference held in Mumbai. The Committee have extensively reviewed and made in-depth study of the procedure followed in Legislatures across the country. The Report of Committee is being presented during this Conference for your consideration and adoption.

The second important Report relates to the telecasting of proceedings of the Legislatures. As you are aware, pursuant to the decision arrived at the Presiding Officers' Conference held in Delhi in October 1996, a Committee of Presiding Officers of State Legislatures on Telecasting of the Proceedings of Legislatures was first constituted on 19 October, 1996 under the Chairmanship of Shri P.A. Sangma, the then Speaker of Lok Sabha. Since then, the Committee have been reconstituted nine times, twice under the Chairmanship of the Speaker, Lok Sabha, five times under the Chairmanship of the Speaker, Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly and twice under the Chairmanship of the Speaker, West Bengal Legislative Assembly. The Committee have completed their deliberations, examining various aspects of telecasting of the proceedings of legislative bodies including funds, manpower, transmission, etc. in detail and have now made a report with their findings, conclusions and recommendations. The Report is being presented to you in this Conference for your consideration and adoption.

I compliment, on behalf of you all, the Chairmen of both the Committees for their excellent Reports.

As you are aware, the Committee of Presiding Officers to Review the Anti-Defection Law presented their report to this august Conference last year on 5 February 2003 at Mumbai. The Report was adopted by the Conference on the same day. The Committee in their report made several recommendations for removing various lacunae in the Anti-Defection Law. One of the recommendations is that the deciding authority in case of members of the Houses of Parliament or State Legislatures may be the Election Commission of India or the State Election Commissions and appellate authorities may be the Supreme Court or the concerned High Courts, respectively. The Speaker, Goa Legislative Assembly, also a member of this Committee, did not agree with this recommendation and gave a note of dissent. Next day, on 6 February 2004, thirteen Presiding Officers addressed a joint letter to my predecessor wherein they requested that 'the Report of the Committee on Anti-Defection Law submitted to the Conference may kindly be discussed thoroughly, before it is considered for adoption. The Conference may deliberate on the Report in the next Conference in Bihar'. This matter was also raised by some Presiding Officers during the Symposium on that day, upon which the then Speaker observed that he would examine this request and take appropriate decision in the matter.

Subsequently, at the meeting of the Standing Committee of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies held on 22 December 2003 at New Delhi, after due deliberations, it was decided that suggestions received from these Presiding Officers on the Report may be discussed at the next Conference of Presiding Officers. Accordingly, the subject has been listed for discussion.

Friends, the subject for the Conference, this time, is 'Legislative Privileges and Freedom of Press', chosen on demands from some of our State Legislatures

and Presiding Officers. The subject is of contemporary relevance and assumes great importance particularly in the light of the controversy arising out of *'The Hindu'* case. The case relates to the award of imprisonment to six senior journalists of *The Hindu* and Murasoli by the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly in a breach of privilege issue. The issue had led to criticism of the decision of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly and there was widespread anger against the award of punishment to the journalists. The journalists have obtained a stay from the Supreme Court and, at present, the case is before a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court for their consideration and judgement. Now it is for the learned Constitution Bench to decide the important questions of law involved in the case. Since the matter is in the apex court of the country, it will be wise not to comment on the case at this stage. The subsequent restraint shown by Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly averted the impending confrontation.

We will have opportunities here at this Conference for serious and meaningful discussion by way of sharing our views and experiences with our learned and experienced fellow Presiding Officers. I am sure, our deliberations will be fruitful and we will be able to come out with valuable ideas and positive suggestions.

While looking at the relationship of the Press with Legislatures, one has to go into the question of legislative privileges. As you know, parliamentary or legislative privileges are certain rights enjoyed by each House collectively and by members of each House individually, without which they cannot discharge their functions. These are the pre-requisites for the smooth and effective functioning of a democracy. Provisions relating to the powers, privileges and immunities of either House of Parliament and Sate Legislatures and of its members and Committees are enshrined in articles 105 and 194 of the Constitution. The fundamental objective of the privileges is to safeguard the freedom, the authority and the dignity of Parliament and other legislative bodies and allow the members to perform their duties without any let or hindrance. They are available to individual members only insofar as they are necessary for the House to perform its functions freely. However, they do not exempt the members from the obligations to the society which apply to other citizens as well.

But granting the privileges to the Legislatures is not enough. It is equally and vitally important to protect the sanctity of these rights. Being the guardian of its own privileges, each House of the Legislature is competent to punish a person found guilty of a breach of privilege or contempt of House either by reprimand or admonition or by imprisonment for a specified period. The courts of law in the country have also recognised this fact in their various learned judgments that the House is the sole authority to judge as to whether

or not there has been a breach of privilege of the House in a particular case. This power of the House is the 'keystone' of parliamentary privileges. It is this power that gives reality to the privileges of Legislature and emphasizes its sovereign character so far as the protection of its rights and the maintenance of its dignity and authority are concerned.

Emphasizing the importance of the freedom of press, the Committee of Privilege of the Sixth Lok Sabha in their Fourth Report (1979) had observed that 'the Committee are conscious that the freedom of the Press is an integral part of the Fundamental Right of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed to all citizens under article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution. The Committee consider it important that in a parliamentary system, the press should enjoy complete freedom to report the proceedings of Parliament fairly and faithfully. If, however, freedom of the Press is exercised *mala fide*, it is the duty of Parliament to intervene in such cases. At the same time, the Committee are of the view that parliamentary privileges should, in no way, fetter or discourage the free expression of opinion or fair comments'.

My fellow Presiding Officers, the success, effectiveness and prestige of any democratic institution rests on its orderly functioning and the extent to which it adheres to the standards of discipline, dignity and decorum for discharging its functions. In recent years, we have witnessed the stalling of the proceedings of the House by raising politically sensitive and controversial issues, even though they do not form part of the listed business. As a result, many hours and sometimes many days of the House are lost. In such circumstances, the task of Presiding Officers becomes complicated, and usually, they find it very difficult to regulate the business of the House. To ensure a smooth functioning of the House and to preserve its grace and dignity, you have to decide according to the situation at that moment and exercise your authority with prudence and wisdom. In the era of coalition politics, your role demands of you to skillfully handle the issues on the floor of the House.

Before I conclude, I would like to express our deep appreciation and hearty thanks to our hosts, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal, Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Hon'ble Speaker of West Bengal Legislative Assembly, Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, Hon'ble Deputy Speaker of West Bengal Legislative Assembly, Shri Kripa Sindhu Saha, the Principal Secretary and his dedicated team of Officers of the West Bengal Legislature Secretariat, the Government of West Bengal and all those associated with the planning and organising of this Conference here, and for their gracious hospitality. I have no doubt that we will have very fruitful deliberations at this Conference.

With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate this Conference.

Thank you very much.

RELEVANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY*

It is indeed a matter of honour for me to be here and to have the opportunity of paying my tributes to one of the Maharashtra's distinguished sons, Shri Jayantrao Tilak, and to deliver this Lecture, organized by the Pune Union of Working Journalists. It is not given to many in public life to excel in so many different fields at the same time and come to make a mark on the socio-political life of the time. Jayantrao Tilak was among those few who had the drive and the commitment to involve himself into diverse areas and activities in the service of the people.

As a journalist and later as a publisher, as an educationist, as a social worker, as a Legislator and Minister, and as the Chairman of the Legislative Council of Maharashtra for nearly one and a half decade, Jayantrao Tilak excelled in every area he came to be associated with and earned for himself a permanent place in the history of Maharashtra. He was among the few Presiding Officers who had the privilege to be in the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for a long time. The awards and accolades he received from numerous sources speak volumes about the recognition he earned and the acceptability he had from across a wide spectrum of the Maharashtrian society. I pay my homage to the memory of this great patriot.

I am happy that Pune's *Shramik Patrakar Sangh* has decided to honour his memory through a Memorial Lecture Series. Justifiably, you have chosen the subject, *Relevance of Parliamentary Democracy in India*, a topic close to Jayantrao Tilakji's heart, for today's Lecture. An independent, responsible and responsive media is as important to parliamentary Government as is democracy to the maintenance of a free Press. A vibrant and vigilant media is a vital link between the people and the political leadership. It is the joint responsibility of both to strengthen the edifice of democracy by working together in harmony. No doubt, it is the duty of the State to safeguard the freedom of the Press. At the same time, the media should also bolster democracy through its varied roles in a responsible and responsive manner. Helping to generate greater awareness about the points of strength and weaknesses of our political system is one of the crucial roles of the media.

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* At the Shri Jayantrao Tilak Memorial Lecture on *Relevance of Parliamentary Democracy in India*, Pune (10 November 2004).

Having come through more than fifty years of formal parliamentary democracy, it is appropriate that we review the experiences that we have gathered about our political experiments and to see for ourselves if we are still on the right track, the track shown and laid through our Constitution by a whole generation of visionary and sagacious leaders of our Freedom Movement.

Friends, when we talk about the relevance of parliamentary democracy, we need to ask ourselves do we have a better alternative to offer? When we adopted a parliamentary system of Government, in the wake of freedom, we were, in fact, not merely adopting a system of Government that would have been in conformity with the system of the colonial rulers and with which we had become familiar by then. The essential concept of a parliamentary system was known to India even before the British came here. Our Founding Fathers were convinced that it was the ideal system for a country as large and diverse as India, a system that would provide for a sense of belonging in the political set up to our diverse population. The overriding consideration, to my mind, was to ensure the centrality of our people in the political processes of the country. A plain reading of the Preamble to our Constitution reinforces this centrality. When you consider the manner in which we secured freedom, after long years of people's struggle, it would become clear that nothing short of this visibly representative character of our political system would have done justice to that popular struggle.

The framers of the Indian Constitution had to decide what would be the most appropriate political set up, which would serve our country best, considering the numerous problems, which had accumulated over the years during which we remained subjugated. The Constituent Assembly had to decide the direction, which India as a free nation should take, and what should be the priorities and who should be the beneficiaries. After a long deliberation in the Constituent Assembly on whether the Presidential System or the Parliamentary System of Government would be the most apposite as the system of governance in the country, the Drafting Committee and ultimately the Constituent Assembly, came to the view that the Parliamentary System with the Cabinet as the Executive would suit our country best. Dr. Ambedkar clearly opted for the Parliamentary System of Government and stated in the Constituent Assembly that 'what the Draft Constitution proposes is the Parliamentary System ... The President of the Indian Union will generally be bound by the advice of his Ministers and the Ministers are members of the Parliament. The daily assessment of responsibility, which is not available under the American System, is, it is felt, far more effective than the periodic assessment, and far more necessary in a country like India.'.

Obviously, the Constitution makers were called upon to evolve a structure which would be most suited and would bring about speedy progress and particularly provide for early removal of poverty, end of exploitation of the deprived sections of society, universal education, an effective health care system, jobs for all and other rights which the citizens of a free country are entitled to enjoy. India, coming out of the foreign domination, had to be converted into a resurgent, dynamic and developed country, intended to play its due role in the comity of nations and the Founding Fathers of the Constitution, considered the strengths and weaknesses of the different political systems, and decided to adopt parliamentary democracy with universal adult suffrage as most suitable for our country, in preference to a Presidential System of Government.

During the British rule, the people of India had not only lost their political freedom but also economic freedom and had been denied any effective participation in the governance of the country. The Constituent Assembly therefore, it is submitted, properly opted for the system of Parliamentary democracy in the form suitable for the country with emphasis on the Fundamental Rights of the citizens and the obligation of the Government to render accounts of their policies and actions to the people through their elected representatives.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at a Seminar on Parliamentary Democracy held on 6 December, 1957, observed that 'Deliberately and after long argument, we in India adopted a Constitution based on Parliamentary Government. The fact that nearly eight years of the working of our Constitution has not in any way made us waver in our allegiance to it indicates our strong faith in it. We praise the Parliamentary form of Government because it is a peaceful method of dealing with problem. It is a method of agreement, discussion, decision and accepting that decision even though one may or may not agree with it. However, a minority in a Parliamentary Government has a very important part to play. Naturally, the majority by the mere fact that it is a majority must have its way'.

One of the main postulates of Parliamentary Democracy is the collective responsibility of the Central Council of Ministers or the Cabinet to the House of People, being the highest elected body and similarly of the States' Council of Ministers to the Assembly of their respective States. For its every action, the Government, either at the Centre or in the States, will be liable to answer in Parliament or the State Assembly, as the case may be, and no Government can avoid accountability on any plea except, perhaps, that of national security, which will also depend upon the decision of the Presiding Officers of the House.

It was reasonably apprehended that the Presidential System would result in concentration of power in the hands of one person with no accountability to the elected representatives of the people, which would stultify democracy and the rights of the people in a newly born democracy like ours. The protagonists of the Presidential System of Government were apparently more concerned with 'stability'; but a stable Government need not be a pro-people Government nor an efficient one and in a country like ours with a pluralistic society, where the people of all States, of all faiths and persuasions, should be able to exercise their rights, there was a great danger of the emergence of an authoritarian regime by dividing the people on the basis of caste, community and religion. Our people though faced with several problems, some of which are overwhelming, have shown great political maturity in the manner they have exercised their democratic rights as has been seen during several elections, when Parties and Governments which acted against the people and deprived them of their democratic rights or failed to deliver the goods have been unceremoniously removed.

Parliamentary System of Government provides the main foundation of our Constitution like democracy and federalism, and endeavour should be made not to change the system with the inevitable danger of one person rule thwarting democracy but to make the governments more accountable, where solution of the peoples' problems and providing them with wherewithals will be the primary responsibility.

In the ultimate analysis, the accountability of the Government is to the people and the country and is enforced in Parliament through their elected representatives. The sovereign power rests with the people and the people participate in the process of governance, in a parliamentary system, through their elected representatives. All the members of Parliament, who are elected on the basis of their pledge contained in their election manifestoes are required, as such representatives, to articulate the people's demands, discuss problems and issues facing the nation and the people, deliberate upon the formulation of national policies and programmes with a view to finding solutions to the problems. Parliament is constituted by the people, deliberates upon and deals with the problems of the people and ultimately has to find solutions for the people. Thus the people occupy the pivotal position in the parliamentary system.

Our parliamentary democracy is based on adult franchise. All citizens of the country above the age of eighteen years can exercise voting rights at the election. Citizens above the age of twenty five years, and free from certain prescribed disqualifications, are entitled to contest the election to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and a citizen of the age of thirty years and above can be a member of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha), which is indirectly elected.

Our Constitution thus swept away in one stroke all the antiquated and undemocratic qualifications, prescribed in the past before Independence, to be eligible for voting, like property, status, title, education, etc. and the principle of one man, one vote and one value has become a constitutional right of each citizen, however, highly or lowly placed one may be and to whatever strata of the society one may belong.

The conferment of the right to vote on the then largely, one may say, illiterate, backward and tradition-ridden poor masses unleashed many powerful forces and new urges. It is the politicization of many traditional, social, cultural and religious institutions, which laid the seeds of change of the whole socio-political power structure and made Indian parliamentary democracy a vibrant and participative one. Direct election was the pillar of the Social Revolution, for, as Nehru wrote, 'an assembly so elected would represent the people as a whole and (would) be far more interested in the economic and social problem of the masses than in the petty communal issues which affect small groups'.

Adult suffrage is the 'acceptance of the fullest implication of democracy and is the most striking feature of the Constitution', Sardar K.M. Pannikar observed. He further stated that 'adult franchise has social implications far beyond its political significance. Many social groups previously unaware of their strength and barely touched by the political changes that had taken place, suddenly realized that they were in a position to wield power'.

Under the form of Government visualized in the Constitution, therefore, our Parliament is expected to occupy a pre-eminent position in our whole political spectrum. The relevance of Parliamentary Democracy is not something questionable today. Our experience of the last more than half a century has only vindicated the correctness of the choice of our Founding Fathers.

Today, we are living in a society, where different generations have a fairly good and realistic understanding of the importance of Parliament in our political life. The poor and the rich, the illiterate and the literate, the farmer and the professional, are all aware of the tremendous impact that the Parliament has in our political process. What is the visible result of this realisation? Parliament has become increasingly representative of all those different classes and shades of opinion in the country. Going by the wider socio-economic and occupational background of the members elected to the present Lok Sabha, it becomes clear that the Parliament is becoming more and more authentically representative of a wider cross-section of our society, thereby enhancing its legitimacy and importance in the eyes of the common man. It is an achievement of the system, and not a mean one by any standard. More so when we consider the fact that it was only in the beginning of the

past century that the actual working class began to find representation in the British Parliament and also the fact that it was only in the 1920s that the Labour Party achieved their first majority in the House of Commons. We, however, have the reputation of having installed a Communist Government in one of the States of our country, through democratic process, as early as within 10 years of achieving Independence.

Parliament, in a genuine democracy, must reflect the heterogeneity and the demographic composition of the society, more importantly, the socio-political aspirations of a majority of the people. Changes in the composition and character of the representative institutions mark only a positive beginning towards the restructuring of the socio-economic foundations of our nation. We are today going through different stages of transition. Many societies before us went through similar stages and socio-political and economic restructuring before they came to experiment with stable systems of Government. Reinforcing that stability is a continuous rather than a one-time process, Franklin D. Roosevelt said, 'Democracy is not a static thing, it is an everlasting march'. Parliamentary democracy has survived, and I would say, quite gloriously, in this country in spite of the prophets of doom and gloom then and now being very sceptical about its viability and suitability for the country. Many thought that the poor economic conditions, low literacy, a hierarchical societal structure, multiple ethnic, religious and linguistic cleavages, were debilitating factors that could inhibit and curtail democratic practices.

In the early years of the Indian Republic, it was a challenge before the national leadership, both in the Government and in the Opposition, to come up with a viable system of Government. Today, having successfully gone through Fourteen General Elections, and numerous elections to the State Assemblies and local bodies, and after experimenting with fairly stable Governments and political life, we have rightly become quite confident about the viability and acceptability of this system of governance for the country. Today we believe that we are capable of working the system, and parliamentary democracy is so deeply entrenched in the country that it has become so much a part of our political life.

Many of the socially and economically deprived sections of society, and the agrarian and rural population, poorly represented in Parliament in the earlier decades, are finding increasing representation now. All these elected representatives are well aware of the great responsibility resting on their shoulders as representatives of the people. In their own way, they also effectively articulate the grievances of the electorate on the floor of the House. An atrocity committed in a tribal village in far-flung areas of the country cannot go unheard in the Chambers of our Parliament today. This indeed is the true representative nature of today's Parliament.

Institutional changes brought about in the form of Departmentally-related Standing Committees of Parliament have added a new dimension to the functioning of our Parliament. Twenty-four such Committees, covering all the Departments of the Government, discuss thread-bare the policies and programmes, the Departmental Reports and the budgetary proposals of the Government, in a more serious and business-like environment outside the Chambers of the two Houses. Each of these Committees in its functioning is a 'mini Parliament'. These Committees' functioning provide a new meaning and content to the concepts of parliamentary surveillance and executive accountability. This is besides the work done by the conventional Parliamentary Committees. Now, under the amended Rules, every Minister has to make a statement every six months on the Reports of the Standing Committee concerning his Ministry.

As you all know, an important characteristic of a parliamentary polity is that it is constantly evolving, it is dynamic, and keeps on changing to suit the changing needs, newer aspirations and hopes of the people, and that is its greatest advantage. In the early years of our experiments with parliamentary democracy, we had borrowed liberally from the Western, especially British parliamentary practices and procedures. But today we can legitimately take pride in adapting our institutions to the specificities of the Indian situation and, in the process, developing many unique practices, rules and customs of our own. Efforts are also being made to catch up with the pace of technological changes taking place around us to facilitate the effective functioning of each member individually and of the House collectively. Such endeavours are also beginning to pay dividends now.

We are aware of some amount of cynicism among our people about our public life in general and about our institutions of governance in particular. Our Parliament is not outside this public scrutiny. The first step towards solving a problem, as you would agree, is identifying the problem itself. I do agree that there have been certain political developments of late which warrant serious attention of all concerned.

Since 1989, we have had several minority Governments at the Centre. This in itself, does not diminish the importance of Parliament in our political set-up nor does it imply in any way that the parliamentary system has failed in our country. As experience elsewhere shows, Coalition Government is an accepted and fully legitimate form of democratic functioning. A successful coalition experiment is also a vindication of a vibrant political plurality. We should not forget that plurality is a fact of life in India. This plurality is best served and sustained in a parliamentary democratic set-up.

We should make more committed efforts to spread the principle of participatory democracy to every level of Government in the country—from the Village Panchayats and the Zila Parishads and Municipalities to the State Legislatures and then to the Parliament. Elections at every level is an educative process for the voters. We should not forget that elections represent the heart-beats of democracy. Another important issue requiring our serious attention is that of women's empowerment and their legitimate political representation in our public institutions at the higher levels.

Parliamentary democracy can sustain itself only on the wilful participation and constructive cooperation of all those who have a stake in it and have an abiding faith in the democratic way of life. The Judiciary, the Press, and the educational institutions have a significant role to play in the sustenance of a vibrant democracy. An independent Judiciary and a free Press are at once a product as also a symbol of a democratic society. They are meant to reinforce one another. We all know how they have flourished in India. They draw strength from the system as also infuse strength into the system.

Friends, today, no one will doubt the need to sustain this system for the success of democracy in the country, in our region and in the world at large nor will anyone doubt our ability to run a democratic system in the country. As an eminent British columnist Bernard Levin, speaking on the 'Paradoxes of Democracy', observed, 'if the democracy of India falls, the end of democracy itself will be in sight'! We cannot afford to take even minor threats to democracy lightly. To quote Levin again... 'remember that every nation that has fallen from democracy into tyranny was at one time only remotely in danger, and we would do well to think of ways that can strengthen our defences'.

Strengthening the basic foundation of parliamentary democracy in our country by cleansing the body politic of its aberrations and the weaknesses and strict adherence to the principles mentioned in the Preamble to our Constitution and transparency in governance, adoption of pro-people economic and agrarian policies, providing to the vulnerable sections of the society their entitlement, universalisation of education and empowerment of women will help in the fulfillment of the goals and objectives for which our freedom fighters and leaders toiled and even gave up their lives and will turn our country into a most vibrant and developed one. India's parliamentary system does not need abrogation but due nursing and principled adherence.

For the system of parliamentary democracy to succeed in order to achieve the objectives of the nation, it is essential that there should be basic commitment to uphold the fundamental principles of democratic behaviour and attitude. There has to be a spirit of cooperation and accommodation

between the Ruling Parties and the Opposition Parties. Though our parliamentary democracy is not based on a two party system, yet in India there is vigorous and alert Opposition, which though consists of several parties and groups, yet on many occasions are able to coordinate their efforts in the discharge of their functions inside Parliament. It is the duty of the Opposition not only to expose the Government's acts of commissions and omissions but also to suggest alternative policies and programmes.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru described parliamentary Government as a method of agreement, discussion and decision in which minority has a very important role to play. Therefore, it is essential that the majority, should pay proper regard to the Opposition's views, specially in a polity which is fractured and a society which is ridden with the various divisive trends and where there are diverse interests and different ideologies represented in the House. In matters of great importance to the nation, the Ruling Party should initiate dialogue and discussions with the Opposition parties before taking a final decision.

Our Constitution which has opted for parliamentary system by and large has served the country well. It has been rightly said by our former President, Dr. K.R. Narayanan that it is not the Constitution that has failed us but the people, who are to implement the constitutional provisions. If the system of checks and balances, the quasi-federal structure as enshrined in the Constitution, conceding to the States the powers vested in them by the Constitution, enjoyment by the people of their rights adumbrated in Parts III and IV of the Constitution are duly recognized and enforced and if the role of the different constitutional authorities is duly recognized and not interfered with and if the rights and entitlements, the urges and aspirations, the demands and dreams of the common people are not forgotten, there is no reason why parliamentary democracy as envisaged by our Constitution makers cannot flourish in its full bloom. We need people with dedication, sincerity and probity who will remove the distortions and infirmities in our body politic and strive for the development of the country with justice and opportunities equally for all within the framework of parliamentary democracy, which should be sustained at all costs. There being no viable alternative, parliamentary democracy remains fully relevant and we have vested interests in nurturing and sustaining it for the sake of our better future.

As is said 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty'. If the civil society remains apathetic or indifferent to the political processes, our liberty itself will be in danger. It is the responsibility of the leaders to ensure that nothing is done that would undermine our people's faith in the efficacy of the institutions of governance. Let us all, therefore, strive together for unleashing the constructive forces and for blunting the growth of anti-democratic elements

so that parliamentary democracy will have the right kind of environment to further consolidate itself in the country. Before I conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to the Working Journalists Union of Pune and its office bearers, to Shri Mohan Dharia, to Shri Suresh Kalmadi, and to all others who have facilitated my visit to this beautiful city and for having the opportunity of sharing my thoughts with you on a subject, close to my heart as well.

Thank you.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND SECURING DEVELOPMENT: A PARLIAMENTARY PERSPECTIVE*

It is indeed a matter of great pleasure for me to be amidst the fellow Presiding Officers and parliamentarians of the Commonwealth fraternity from Asia. I join the host Secretariat in welcoming our friends from other countries to India and to the Conference here. The theme of the Conference here, *Strengthening Democracy and Securing Development: Role of Parliamentarians of the Asia Region*, is of great significance and relevance to us all, as we are deeply committed to the strengthening of parliamentary democracy in our respective countries, in the Asian region in particular and in the world at large. I am sure, this Conference will afford us an opportunity to share our views and ideas on important issues of concern to democracies everywhere.

I am glad that the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly has taken the initiative under the aegis of the Andhra Pradesh Branch of the CPA to host this Conference in this beautiful city. I compliment the Speaker, Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly, Shri K.R. Suresh Reddy and all others associated with the planning and organisation of this Conference.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, a unique association of sovereign States, is deeply committed to the lofty ideals of Rule of Law, human dignity, individual rights and freedoms and parliamentary democracy. In its long history of almost a century, the Commonwealth has undergone radical changes in its composition and objectives. Starting as a small organisation of a few parliamentary democracies which formed part of the erstwhile British Empire, the Association has today grown into a large multinational entity, encompassing in it more than fifty States. It has within it some of the highly developed countries and a large number of countries at different stages of development, still grappling with the multifarious problems of poverty, unemployment and socio-economic backwardness of different degrees. As we all know, only through multi-faceted cooperation among the Commonwealth countries can we meet these grave challenges and impart a new meaning and dynamism to the CPA itself .

Friends, recent years have witnessed the emergence of democracy as the most preferred system of governance across the world. It has already

* At the inauguration of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Asia-Region Seminar, Hyderabad (18 November 2004).

established its unquestionable supremacy over all other systems of Government. In this process, the whole concept of democracy itself has acquired new meaning and relevance for a larger segment of the global society today. For the developed societies, democracy is no longer about the institutional arrangements alone, it is about what those institutions deliver and how accountable, responsive and transparent are they in their functioning.

Most democracies in our region, however, are still faced with the stupendous challenge of meeting the growing expectations of the masses, for providing them with the basic necessities for a dignified existence. This challenge can be effectively met only if the entire global society, particularly the rich, become sensitive to the needs and aspirations of those living on the fringes, in different parts of the world.

It is imperative for democracy to have an effective social dimension if it is to sustain popular support. Wiping out the maladies of poverty and ignorance must become and remain our primary concern as their continuance will undermine democracy everywhere. For those who do not have the means for a dignified human existence, including at least the minimum levels of education, are unlikely to be unduly concerned about the intricacies of democratic functioning.

It should, therefore, be the primary endeavour of parliamentarians to transform our democracies so that political democracy exist side by side with social progress and economic democracy as well. We have to take initiatives to ensure that developing societies have their effective say in the decision-making bodies which have a bearing on the lives of the people everywhere.

Another area requiring the attention of the parliamentarians of the India and those of the Asia region, to my mind, is about the content of the political democracy itself in some of our societies. There exists a wide variety of political institutions in the countries of the Asia region. We, in the Commonwealth should, while taking steps to ensure that the time-tested traditions of each of our societies are maintained, seek to improve the quality of political democracy in some of our member countries. Without adhering to the basic tenets of representative and responsible Government we cannot have a truly democratic system. A sense of participation in governance, and a recognition of the stake in the preservation of the democratic system among the substantial majority of the population are essential for the successful functioning of parliamentary democracy.

Friends, during the present Conference, there will be Panel Sessions on four important issues, namely on *"Eradicating Hunger and Poverty—Role of Parliamentarians"; "Corruption—A Threat to Democracy"; "The Role of Parliaments and Parliamentarians in Enhancing Good Governance"* and *"Towards Sustainable*

Development in the Asia Region". Needless to say, these subjects have significant implications for the progress and prosperity of humankind, as also for reinforcing the edifice of democracy.

Poverty, down the history of mankind, has been one of the major factors of human conflict and it is a potent factor which can undermine democracy. A country where a large section of the population is steeped in poverty and deprivation, cannot run democratic institutions smoothly and efficiently. Poverty elimination, therefore, has to be high on the agenda of democratic societies. Though the countries in the Asian continent have made rapid progress in such diverse fields as agriculture, industry, science and technology, etc., the fact remains that development has bypassed a substantial section of our peoples.

A significant contribution that the parliamentarians can make towards further reinforcement of democratic ideals is by striving to eliminate poverty and hunger. Poverty reduction should be one of our primary objectives. The entire population of the country is to be involved in the developmental process as we cannot afford to ignore the interests of the large majority while working for economic progress. It is against this backdrop that parliamentarians need to lay equal emphasis on economic and political democracy.

Corruption is another challenge that we face. Corruption is an insidious plague that corrodes the vitals of many societies, particularly among the developing countries. Not only does it pose a serious challenge to development, but it can also undermine democracy and good governance. The evil of corruption can be attributed to the erosion of moral and ethical values and standards in the society at large. It is a manifestation of poor governance and poses a serious threat to the Rule of Law and the stability and security of societies.

Corruption causes loss of substantial public funds needed for such diverse areas as education, health-care and poverty alleviation, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of poverty and backwardness. If it is not contained, it will undermine the legitimacy of Government and destroy values such as trust and tolerance. It is, therefore incumbent upon parliamentarians to expose corruption and unethical practices not only for upholding public morality in our societies but also for their economic advancement and social progress.

It has to be kept in mind that corruption cannot be effectively tackled in isolation from other problems. It can be checked through the reform of the political process and by re-orienting the Governmental machinery. Parliamentarians as the people's representatives and Parliaments as the sovereign representative institutions of the people have a primary duty to

tackle the scourge of corruption. At the individual level, we parliamentarians have to set an example through our own personal behaviour. Parliaments must make full use of constitutional and other legal mechanisms for ensuring oversight of Government and, thereby promoting transparency and accountability in governance. Where there are no adequate legal provisions to deal with corruption and the corrupt, laws must be put in place at the earliest. What is important is to devise effective institutional mechanisms to contain this menace.

Fellow parliamentarians, all of us are fully aware of the importance of good governance to democracy. One of the important determinants of successful democratic consolidation is the ability of democratically elected Governments to provide good governance. A test-case for good governance is the Government's ability to maintain peace and order, promote or create conditions necessary for economic growth, and ensure at least a minimum level of social security. For the realization of these commendable objectives, the involvement and participation of the people at all stages of planning, implementation and monitoring are extremely crucial.

Good governance is a prerequisite for development and progress. Unfortunately, there are many societies which have not been able to provide and ensure good governance and this will sooner than later lead to the degeneration of democracy and will undermine democratic institutions. The other test-case for good governance is the extent of the responsibility, transparency and accountability that the institutions of Government demonstrate at all times. In a parliamentary system, the greatest challenge is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. In this context, parliamentarians with their rich and varied experiences can suggest ways and means to provide good governance in their respective countries so that we can help in building an egalitarian, progressive and prosperous social order.

Sustainable development is yet another challenge that we are confronted with today. No one can dispute that concerns for the environment and development should go together. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two. While formulating models of development, ecological and conservation needs, and the requirements of local populations, should be our overriding concerns. These needs and requirements are to be properly understood and forcefully articulated by the peoples' representatives and brought to our Parliaments. With ample scope for free and informed debates and discussions, our Parliaments are undoubtedly the best fora for evolving consensus on the wide range of environmental issues. Our parliamentarians can and must explain the initiatives to the people, create awareness and enlist their cooperation in preserving our environment.

Friends, in the highly interdependent world of today, democratic societies cannot sustain and grow in isolation. Practice of democracy will continue to be imperfect as long as vast masses continue to live in poverty and misery. Bridging the disparities between and within nations is an essential step we have to take to strengthen the fabric of democracy. Developed countries on their part must be perceptive of, and responsive to the needs, interests, capacities and potentials of the developing countries. We need to make sincere and vigorous efforts to strengthen all the fundamentals of the democratic polity by addressing all such issues that weaken democratic institutions. At the same time, we must spare no effort to tackle the threats to democracy posed by poverty, war, socio-economic inequality, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, etc. I am sure our joint efforts will go a long way in creating an appropriate climate in which democracy can survive, sustain and get strengthened further.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Conference. I am sure, your deliberations will be fruitful and throw up new ideas and perspectives which will go a long way in further strengthening democracy in the countries of Asia.

Thank you.

BRINGING PARLIAMENT CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE*

It is indeed a great honour for me to launch a dedicated satellite channel for the live telecast of the proceedings of Lok Sabha from today onwards. With this, India joins a few other nations such as Canada, USA, UK, Denmark, Iran, Hungary and Bulgaria which have been telecasting live the entire proceedings of their Parliament.

We are grateful to the Hon'ble Vice-President for his kind consent for proceeding with this programme. I also extend my thanks to Hon'ble Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Shri Jaipal Reddy, Officers of the *Doordarshan* and of the Lok Sabha for their cooperation. We have moved ahead step by step towards telecasting live the proceedings. I recall that it was on 20 December 1989 when the President's Address to the members of both the Houses of Parliament in the Central Hall was telecast live for the first time by Doordarshan on their National Channel. Later the Question Hour in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha and other important proceedings such as the President's Address, General and Railway Budgets, Motions of Confidence and No-Confidence, Election of Speaker and Deputy Speaker, Important Statements, etc. are being telecast live on Doordarshan's National Channel or DD-News Channel. The programmes are telecast live on two Low Power Transmitters with a very limited reach. Naturally, the people were having only a limited scope to watch the parliamentary proceedings.

We have taken the initiatives for telecasting the entire proceedings of the House so that it is a live and true reflection of what is going on in the House. What is known as the 'Zero Hour' proceedings in Lok Sabha are being telecast live since 5 July 2004.

Now the live telecast of the entire proceedings through the satellite channels would provide the people all over the country and abroad direct access to and first hand knowledge of the working of their elected representatives in the highest democratic institution.

Live telecast will enable the people to acquaint themselves with the parliamentary procedures and conventions. It can contribute substantially to the better public understanding of the diverse issues of national and

* At the launch of two Satellite Channels for the live telecast of the proceedings of Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha in Parliament House, New Delhi (14 December 2004).

international importance being considered by the House and the process by which a Legislature undertakes legislation. People across the nation would now be able to witness how their representatives are functioning in projecting their aspirations, and ventilate their grievances. Such an exposure, I believe, will make parliamentarians more alert and accountable to the public and make debates more purposeful and meaningful.

The House of the People, the Lok Sabha, and the Rajya Sabha are the highest fora of national importance and the entire system of Parliamentary Democracy get sustenance from the proper functioning of these two Houses, which provide the platform not only for making laws but also for debates, discussions and raising issues for the purpose of solving the peoples' problems.

One cannot deny that transparency in functioning as also proper articulation of the peoples' problems are the basic postulates of a vibrant Parliamentary Democracy. Our Constitution makes the Central Council of Ministers responsible to the House of the People and the Hon'ble members of the House are accountable to the people who are the real masters. Therefore, we cannot but concede to the people's right to know what is happening inside the House, which is composed of their representatives. With the availability of modern technology it is now possible to let the people know live as to what is being discussed and debated and how we are functioning. The telecast will provide a direct link between the people and the functioning of the Houses and the Hon'ble members. I have been told that the telecast of the proceedings will reach about 40 million households in the country, which means that about 200 million people will have direct access to the proceedings of the Parliament through these channels.

The dedicated channels of Parliament will also offer ample scope for telecasting innovative television programmes in the form of capsules and documentaries. Such programmes will be largely based on actual parliamentary debates, discussions pertaining to important bills, policy measures introduced by the Government, Interviews, etc. on different aspects of democratic set up.

Once again I express my sincere thanks to all those who have made the live telecast possible, which is going to be inaugurated today.

Thank you.

SETTING BENCHMARKS FOR PARLIAMENTARY FUNCTIONING*

I am indeed happy to be here with you all today and to have the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering of Whips of our Parliament and the State Legislatures. I am thankful to the Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Shri Gulam Nabi Azad, for giving me this opportunity. I would also like to felicitate the Whips and Leaders of various political parties in Parliament and the State Legislatures who have gathered here for the Conference.

I understand that the Conference deliberated in detail on the Report of the Monitoring Group of the Twelfth All India Whips' Conference in respect of the status of implementation of its twenty four Recommendations. Some of the recommendations have far-reaching significance insofar as the health and vigour of our democracy is concerned. The recommendations relating to a code regulating the relationship between members of Parliament and the State Legislatures with their respective Governments, a code of conduct for members of Parliament and State Legislatures, implementation of governmental assurances and maintenance of quorum in the House are indeed noteworthy. Also important are the recommendations on the introduction of Youth Parliament schemes in States, provision of computer facilities to legislators and strengthening of research and information services for members. I trust that you have had purposive discussions on all these matters.

Friends, parliamentary democracy represents and reflects the highest form of political experiment in the civilized world. Democratic governance has been acknowledged to be the most successful and preferred form of governance all around the world, primarily because of its representational nature where the free will of the people gets truly reflected and greatly respected. As the supreme legislative body representing the collective will and wisdom of the people, the representative institutions have been given a pre-eminent position in every nation's democratic set-up. Since they represent the will and the aspirations of the people in the highest Legislative Bodies it is the onerous duty of the elected representatives to ensure that the responsibilities entrusted to them are fulfilled in full earnest.

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* At the Valedictory Session of the Thirteenth All India Whips' Conference, Hyderabad (5 February 2005).

Ours is the largest working democracy in the world, both in terms of people's participation and also in the context of the classical traditions of the basic tenets of democracy. Parliament, as I said earlier, is the repository of the will of the people. That being so, the nation and the people would naturally expect the Parliament to make the optimum utilization of the precious time of the House to address the myriad issues before us. This is possible only when the proceedings of Parliament as also of our Legislative Bodies are conducted smoothly, without disturbance and disruption. As such, it is imperative that the representative institutions must maintain high standards of discipline and decorum in their functioning and should conduct themselves in such a way that they are role models for other institutions and organizations of State.

As all of you know, there is now a body of opinion that there is a perceptible decline of Parliament and State Legislatures in their dignity and demeanour. This perception has gained ground, especially in recent years. As a Presiding Officer, I feel concerned that on several occasions, our Legislative Bodies have failed to transact the listed business because of pandemonium, continued disruptions and frequent adjournments, sometimes even on trivial issues. You would recall that the Railway and the General Budgets for the year 2004-05 were passed by our Parliament without discussion: This, you all will agree, is certainly not a healthy development as Executive accountability to the Legislature, which is a cardinal principle of democracy, gets compromised when even the most essential financial business like the national Budget is passed without discussion. Such disruptions lead not only to the wastage of the precious parliamentary time and energy but also makes for a colossal loss to the exchequer. In the process, the people are the real losers; so are democracy and good governance. The crucial question before us then is how do we change this trend? This onerous task can be attempted if we all, including the Presiding Officers, members of our Legislative Bodies and Leaders and Whips of various political parties, work in close cooperation with one another. Our citizens have reposed their faith in our democratic institutions and we as their representatives are duty-bound to live up to their expectations, thus enhancing the dignity and prestige of our elected bodies.

In recent years, the issue of discipline and decorum in our Legislatures has been deliberated on numerous occasions. The All India Conference of Presiding Officers, Leaders of Parties, Ministers of Parliamentary Affairs, Whips, Parliamentarians and Legislators on 'Discipline and Decorum in the Parliament and State Legislatures' held in September 1992 resolved that the political parties should evolve a code of conduct for their legislators and ensure its observance by them. We had reiterated our commitment to preserve and enhance the prestige of Parliament at the Special Session of Parliament held to mark the Golden Jubilee of our Independence in August 1997. At the

64th Conference of Presiding Officers held at Chandigarh in June 2001, we had in-depth deliberations on the need to evolve a code of conduct for legislators and steps to contain frequent adjournments of the Legislatures on account of interruptions. Another All-India Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies, Chief Ministers, Ministers of Parliamentary Affairs and Leaders and Whips of Parties, convened in November 2001 in New Delhi, also deliberated on the issue. As recently as in November 2004, we had convened a meeting of leaders of all political Parties in Parliament to discuss this vital issue. I must acknowledge here that there is a growing appreciation, among the members and the Leaders, of the need to facilitate the smooth functioning of Parliament today. As a result, there was a perceptible improvement in the atmosphere in the Parliament in the recently concluded Session and more and more members were able to take part in the serious parliamentary work, thereby effectively utilizing its limited time.

Friends, therefore, I would like to believe that the recurring incidents of disorder and disruption in our Legislatures are not going to be a permanent phenomenon. It is my sincere request to all those who are directly or indirectly associated with the functioning of our parliamentary system—be it the members of the Treasury Benches or the Opposition, Political Parties and Groups both at the Centre and in the States—to work together, cutting across political ideologies and barriers, keeping national weal uppermost in their minds all the time. I am sure, if we work in concert with sincerity and a broad understanding of issues, we can effectively function, without the hon'ble members giving up their respective political beliefs and the party's programmes and policies.

There are prescribed parliamentary procedures and rules to register the members' concerns and give voice to their political views. It is the greatness of democracy that it provides ample opportunities for the advocacy of people's demands and expectations in a prescribed and dignified manner. If the situation so demands, we can even further widen the scope of our rules and procedures to accommodate discussions on matters of urgent public importance. After all, Parliament is a living, dynamic institution and its set of rules and procedures are intended to facilitate the articulation of the concerns and considerations of the people.

As you all know, we have already constituted Committees on Ethics in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Several State Legislatures have also set up Ethics Committees. These Committees have come out with laudable recommendations to facilitate smooth and orderly conduct of the business of the House. For example, in its Second Report, the Committee on Ethics in the Lok Sabha has appropriately stated that the remedy with regard to the prevalent malaise of disorderliness in Legislatures lies in the enforcement of existing norms of ethical behaviour for members.

Various parliamentary functionaries have been established by conventions, traditions and customs in our representative institutions. In this respect, the evolution of the office of the Whips—both Government and Opposition—is of crucial importance for the functioning of parliamentary democracy. Although it is a little known office outside of the House, as a Presiding Officer, I understand their crucial responsibility and their role in the day-to-day functioning of the House. They have a very positive and creative role to play in ensuring the smooth transaction of the business of the House. Traditionally considered to be the people 'who make and keep the House', the Whips have special responsibilities in the present day context as well.

Friends, today, our polity has entered the coalition era. One of the dimensions of a coalition Government relating to time management is the increase in the number of political parties represented in the House. In the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, we have 38 Political Parties and Groups representing different ideologies and varying shades of political opinion. Several of our States also have a large number of political parties represented in their Legislatures. In this changed scenario, it becomes most important for the Whips of political parties to meet periodically at the national level and make a review of their roles and responsibilities and strive together for strengthening democracy.

Friends, it may not be that only by strict implementation of rules and punitive methods the dignity of the House can be preserved. Understanding and a sense of responsibility on the part of the members will go a long way in facilitating the smooth and orderly conduct of the House. The Whips and members play a positive role in ensuring that the rules are respected and adhered to for democracy to function in a purposive manner. They should also have the conviction that the best forum to find a solution to any pressing problem is the floor of the House where all points of view are heard and discussed and a consensus is reached on the basis of a reasoned debate rather than through confrontation and disorderly behaviour. We must understand that in matters of national interest, we must be accommodative of one another's concerns and viewpoints.

Difference of opinion between and among the political parties are part and parcel of a vibrant democracy. It is through the clash of conflicting viewpoints that consensus emerges and differing perceptions get blended into a single stream. While articulating their viewpoints, members should strive to make sure that they do not overstep the limits which they themselves have laid down in the form of rules and regulations. It is the responsibility of the Whips as well to make sure that the conduct of their members are within the limits of the rules and should not lead to disorderly scenes which obstruct the smooth conduct of legislative business.

It needs reiteration that orderly conduct of the business of the House is most essential for the growth of democracy. It calls for unstinted cooperation and utmost understanding amongst all concerned, especially the Whips of various political parties in all our Legislative Bodies. I am sure, organizing the All-India Whips' Conference periodically is an important step in this direction as it enables sharing of experiences and learning from one another. Such Conferences facilitate the achievement of a broad-based understanding on matters of common concern and the evolution of high parliamentary standards. The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs deserves to be complimented for organizing this Thirteenth All India Whips' Conference. I trust that this Conference will be an important step towards ensuring decorum and smooth conduct of proceedings in our Legislative Bodies.

Thank you.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ELECTION MANAGEMENT*

It gives me great pleasure to be here today in the midst of such a distinguished gathering at the inauguration of the Conference on ***Improving the Quality of Election Management,*** organized under the joint auspices of the Commonwealth Secretariat, London, and the Election Commission of India. I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to inaugurate this Conference on a theme of crucial importance to democracy and to share my views and thoughts with you all.

The Commonwealth is a repository of the finest traditions of parliamentary democracy and the Election Commission of India is entrusted with the onerous task of conducting the largest electoral exercise in the world. That being so, when they bring together the Chief Electoral Officers from the Commonwealth Community to deliberate on improving the quality of election management, it is indeed an occasion for meaningful deliberations on deepening democracy in general and for strengthening the electoral process in particular.

As you all are aware, democracy rests on the belief that the people are the source as well as the purpose of power in the polity. It is their consent expressed periodically through elections, which, either directly or indirectly, legitimizes the decision-making process. As a system of governance, democracy has evolved gradually from the days of direct participation by the Athenians through the European experimentation in participatory politics to its modern existence where decisions are taken by elected representatives on behalf of the people. The signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, the French and American Revolutions in the 18th century, the widening of the scope of franchise in various parts of the world, and to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 setting out the basic premises for universal and equal suffrage have been the major landmarks in the onward march of democracy.

Modern democracies are representative in character and spirit; they depend on the force of political mobilization and articulation of the diverse interests of society as their very lifeline. Elections represent the heart-beats of democracy; through elections, we undertake the task of translating the consent

* At the inauguration of the Conference on *Improving the Quality of Election Management*, organised on the Joint auspices of the Commonwealth Secretariat, London and the Election Commission of India, New Delhi (24 February 2005).

of the people into the authority to govern. Elections are not merely confined to selecting candidates for governance; elections also offer a forum for the people to decide on policy issues that are placed before them through the manifestoes by various political parties and groups. They also provide an opportunity to test a country's democratic health in terms of progress and development. As Thomas Jefferson once said: 'Elective Government is calculated to promote.... happiness, peculiarly adapted to their genius, habits and situations, and the best permanent corrective of the errors or abuses of those entrusted with power.'

It is in this context that the conduct of free and fair elections assumes greater significance as a crucial element in the process of leading a country towards good governance and development. The nature and character of the electoral system prevalent in a country is of paramount importance as the planning and preparation for the polls need to be done with utmost care in order to ensure that the elections are held as per constitutional mandate and are devoid of malpractices and manipulations. In short, the quality of election management will have a great say in how best democracy works in a country.

If elections are the heart-beats of democracy, then it is imperative that they are managed in the best possible manner. This onerous task is assigned to the Election Commissions in the respective countries. By and large, these election management bodies have constitutional safeguards to enable them to function in a free and fair manner, sidestepping executive and political pressure. The Election Commission in India is a constitutional body and they should have ample power and authority so that they can operate without fear or favour in the larger interests of democracy. If that is assured, the political leadership and others who are essential components of the electoral process will be duty-bound to follow the constitutional and procedural directions as laid down by the law of the land. For this, the credibility and the legitimacy of the Election Commissions have to be secured.

Friends, the integrity of the electoral process, to my mind, is first and foremost linked to the integrity and effectiveness of the machinery entrusted with the task of conducting elections. Some other components in the context of the integrity of the electoral process have now been identified to include a code of ethical political behaviour, a free and mandated electoral procedure, political freedom, accountability of all stakeholders, commitment to good governance and rooting out of electoral corruption, malpractices and manipulations. A non-political and non-partisan Commission, with credible management practices, good operations system, integrity mechanisms, including transparency and accounting mechanisms, and making use of appropriate information management techniques, can gain the confidence of the political parties, the people and the nation as a whole.

When we talk of improving the quality of election management, a host of factors come into the picture. Ensuring quality and further improving it undoubtedly call for better management practices insofar as procedural formalities are concerned. But as the nature and content of democracy vary from country to country depending on native realities and their socio-economic and political milieu, their electoral practices and procedures would also differ substantially, though, at the core, all swear by free and fair elections based on universal adult franchise.

The most vital element in the electoral system is the electorate itself. So, better quality means better management of the electorate *per se*. The world over, we hear about low electoral turn-out in the polls. One of the challenges of election management will be how best to enthuse the electorate to turn out in large numbers on the polling day. Some countries like Australia, Belgium, Fiji, Singapore, Switzerland, Uruguay, etc. have mandated compulsory voting. If we have to ensure that more people vote, all those involved in the electoral process, including the Election Commission, political parties, political leaders, the media, etc. will have to pool in their efforts. Voter apathy, without doubt, is detrimental to the health of any democratic polity. That being so, we need to educate the voters on the high value of their franchise and their inalienable electoral right. It is a right of citizenship, a national duty and a civic responsibility. School and university curriculum should lay emphasis on this fact. The younger voters should be encouraged to exercise their right to vote and made to realize the power of their franchise. This is important for strengthening and deepening the democratic fabric of a country.

On another plane, low voter turn out is also often attributed to the manner in which electoral rolls are prepared. We read about how in several countries malpractices take place in the enrolment of voters and the subsequent preparation of the voters' list. We also hear of gerrymandering to benefit the ruling establishment, voter intimidation, corrupt practices, nepotism, booth-capturing, etc. Political apathy caused by the intrusion of undesirable elements into the electoral arena and into public life is another discouraging factor. I believe that various electoral malpractices can be checked or rooted out if we all work in concert to cleanse the electoral system of these detrimental factors.

I also believe that the revolutionary advancements in information and communications technology can be made use of in facilitating better management of elections. This will also pave the way for increased efficiency, better financial control and enhanced transparency. The preparation of electoral rolls, inventories, better voting practices like electronic voting machines, counting of votes, declaration of results, post-election dissemination of election data, etc. can also stand to gain from appropriate use of technology. Better voter education through the ICT can also lead to a more informed electorate;

eventually, the cause of democracy and good governance will benefit immeasurably through an informed electorate. In particular, the political parties and the media can play a very proactive role and help the Election Management Bodies in this regard.

As you all will agree, electoral reforms are an integral part of improving the quality of election management. Electoral reforms are an ongoing process, ever evolving to cope with the challenges of the times as also the ground realities of each country. Every country will have to constantly keep track of its requirements, without compromising on the inherent components of good electoral practices. For example, across the world, today, there is an increased awareness on building a greater partnership between women and men in the decision-making processes. This goal can be achieved only in an environment where the electoral process is so reformed as to provide for greater representation of women in the representative bodies. The empowerment of women, including by way of their enhanced representation in the decision-making processes, should be a prime concern for election managers.

Serious debate is also going on in parliamentary polities about public funding of elections as a means to curb money and muscle power in elections. Here again, political parties and other stakeholders should come together to work out a consensus on cleansing the electoral process of the malaise of corruption. Another area of debate is the role of the media during election times, especially in the context of publishing of opinion polls, exit polls, etc. This assumes a special significance in countries where the electoral process is staggered and elections are held on different dates. The media, being a 'watchdog' in a democracy, has varied roles of voter educator, objective reporter of election campaigns, platform for political communication by parties, disseminator of election results and analyses, etc. It will be in the best interests of democracy and the electoral process if the media plays its multi-functional roles with care, caution and objectivity.

I am particularly delighted that the Election Commission of our country is collaborating with the Commonwealth Secretariat in organizing this Conference of Chief Electoral Officers. It goes to the credit of the Founding Fathers of our Constitution and our people's ability and commitment to nurture and sustain democracy that today India enjoys the unique distinction of being the largest successful democracy in the world. The Constitution provides for a self-contained chapter placing the Election Commission above all political and governmental pressures for the superintendence, direction and control of the elections to the Parliament and Legislatures. The Parliament has been empowered to make laws relating to all matters in connection with the elections to our representative bodies. The decisions of the Election Commission of India can be challenged in the High Court and the

Supreme Court of India by appropriate petition. But, by virtue of long standing conventions and pronouncements, once the actual process of elections has started, the Judiciary does not intervene in the poll process.

As you all know, the conduct of a general election in India is a gigantic task involving many challenges. A significant feature of our electoral process is the Model Code of Conduct in order to check unfair and unscrupulous practices during the elections. The Election Commission ensures a level playing field for all the political parties during the elections by making them strictly comply with the Model Code of Conduct.

It is, indeed, noteworthy that during the last five decades and more, the Election Commission has successfully accomplished the tasks assigned to it and secured a place for itself in our parliamentary system. Its credibility and objectivity have won the Commission the admiration of all concerned. As a matter of fact, our political parties and leaders as also the people look up to the Commission as a bulwark in the cause of democracy. It is no wonder then that our Election Commission has emerged as a role model for election management bodies across the world. Time and again, our officers have served and are still serving in various capacities on several UN and other international missions on elections.

In the constant endeavour to strengthen the culture of democracy in our electoral system, the question of bringing about electoral reforms has been engaging the attention of all concerned in our country. I would like to emphasize that we, in India, believe that it is a joint responsibility of the Parliament, the Government and the Political Parties, in addition to the Election Commission, to review, from time to time, various aspects of concern relating to the electoral process and come out with viable solutions to make it more purposive and meaningful.

Friends, I am sure you all will agree that election management is certainly one area where we can learn from one another's experiences and experiments to help promote capacity-building for the conduct of free and fair elections. This Conference offers us an opportunity to analyse and debate the problem areas in this field. I am sure, the Conference would go a long way in addressing the areas of concern through the development of closer links among the Commonwealth fraternity. I extend my best wishes to the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Election Commission of India and the Chief Electoral Officers from the Commonwealth countries for successful and fruitful deliberations during the Conference.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Conference.

Thank you.

HONOURING OUTSTANDING PARLIAMENTARIANS*

I

I am honoured to welcome you all in this historic Central Hall of our Parliament to this function to confer the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the years 1999 to 2002. On behalf of the Indian Parliamentary Group and on my own behalf, I express my profound gratitude to Respected *Rashtrapatiji*, Hon'ble *Up-Rashtrapatiji* and the Hon'ble Prime Minister, who is also one of the recipients of the Award, as also the other distinguished recipients of the Award, for gracing this occasion. I deeply value the kind consent of our Esteemed *Rashtrapatiji* to confer the Awards and address this gathering.

I take this opportunity to heartily congratulate Shri Lal Krishna Advaniji, Shri Arjun Singhji, Shri Jaswant Singhji and Dr. Manmohan Singhji on their being chosen for the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the year 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002, respectively. Their choice, in fact, enhances the prestige of the Award substantially and we are deeply beholden to them that they have honoured the nomination made by their own peers. It is a matter of great pleasure for me to welcome these Outstanding Parliamentarians to today's function.

Instituted by the Indian Parliamentary Group, the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award is bestowed on parliamentarians of great eminence for their long standing contribution towards strengthening our parliamentary edifice. The Award, in a way, also acknowledges the pre-eminence of democracy as a way of life in our country which should be preserved and protected. It also recognizes that democracy needs to be nurtured with discipline and decorum, respecting the primacy of the will of the people at all times and in the service of the people.

All through our parliamentary history, we have had very eminent parliamentarians who enriched our democracy and our parliamentary culture. Hon'ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Union Minister Shri Arjun Singh, and Leaders of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, Shri L.K. Advani and Shri Jaswant Singh, respectively, have lived up to this illustrious tradition. Their varied contributions, over the years, have been of great significance in shaping and guiding the destiny of our polity as the largest working democracy in the world. By their dignified conduct in and outside Parliament and unwavering commitment to parliamentary democracy,

* At the function to confer the Outstanding Parliamentarian Awards for the years 1999 to 2002 in the Central Hall of Parliament House, New Delhi (21 March 2005).

they have earned the respect and esteem of the parliamentary fraternity everywhere.

Throughout their public life, these Outstanding Parliamentarians have served the nation and the Parliament well irrespective of whether they held any office or not. In fact, it is a tribute to our parliamentary democracy that today, we are honouring the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Upper House, Leaders of Opposition in the two Houses of our Parliament and a Union Minister who has also been a Leader of the popular House in the past as Outstanding Parliamentarians. By conferring the Award on these eminent leaders, we are, indeed, honouring our democratic temperament and democracy itself.

Shri Lal Krishna Advani, who has been bestowed the Award for the year 1999 is known for his gracious demeanour and steely determination. He has been a leading figure in Indian politics for long, with a parliamentary career of over three decades. With his clarity of vision and astute analytical ability, he has elevated parliamentary politics to great heights. Highly committed to principles and values, he has a sound understanding of the challenges before the nation. Endowed with exceptional leadership qualities, he has graced senior positions in Government including that of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of India. Advaniji is undoubtedly a sturdy pillar of strength to our parliamentary democracy.

Arjun Singhji, who has befittingly been chosen for the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the year 2000, has always been a formidable leader in Indian politics, earning admiration from far and wide for his remarkable political acumen and administrative skills. Widely acknowledged as a staunch votary of a secular and democratic India, he has excelled in public life as a legislator, Minister and Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, as the Governor of Punjab, and as a Minister at the Centre, holding key portfolios. By his forthright articulation of causes dear to his heart, and forceful presentation of issues in perspective, he has carved out a niche for himself in our parliamentary life.

Shri Jaswant Singh, who has been conferred the Award for the year 2001, is yet another important figure in the political firmament of our country. An erudite scholar and a splendid combination of the best of both tradition and modernity, he is frank and forthright in his political views. Throughout his long and illustrious career as a member of Parliament, he has enriched our parliamentary proceedings as a brilliant speaker, with well-reasoned arguments and seasoned expostulations on a wide array of issues. He has also played a distinctive role in strengthening our Committee system, having been the Chairman of various important Committees of our Parliament. He has shouldered with distinction onerous responsibilities in the Government, holding prominent ministerial positions.

The IPG has conferred the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the year 2002 on Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India who is also one of the most well-known economists of the country. His is a classic example of the finest virtues of clean and value-based politics. Suave and soft spoken, he is unassuming in his demeanour but firm and bold in his decisions. He believes in the politics of consensus and has a very scholarly and pragmatic approach towards his missions in life. His role in ushering in an era of economic reforms with a human face and without compromising on the national interest is recognized worldwide. He has ceaselessly strived for an India with capable and empowered human resource, an India which is modern and rational in outlook, and an India which actively engages itself with assurance and confidence with the rest of the world. Dedicated to the cause of the people, in Dr. Manmohan Singh, we have a Prime Minister as also an acclaimed democrat and a fine human being who leads the country with firmness and vision.

Friends, Parliament is the center-stage of the nation where we witness democracy, with all its pitfalls, in action. It is here that the common good of society is debated, articulated and transformed into policy directions. As elected representatives of the people, we, the parliamentarians, are looked upon as living symbols of character and integrity. It is our conviction and commitment to this belief the people has in us that would make or mar the credibility of Parliament, rather our parliamentary system itself. In this backdrop, it becomes essential that the precious time of the supreme institution of the land is utilized judiciously, to further people's genuine interests and in a manner helping to enhance India's treasured position as the largest working democracy in the world.

Less than a year ago, we came through yet another massive electoral exercise through which the people of India bestowed their faith in us and sent us to this august institution to articulate their concerns and considerations and to provide effective leadership in addressing them. We have amongst us a large number of new and young members. The people of the country, the legislators in our States and people's representatives at other levels look up to us for inspiration. We, therefore, need to constantly strive to live up to the expectations of our people and bring more honour to our elected bodies.

With these words, I, once again, heartily congratulate Dr. Manmohan Singhji, Advaniji, Arjun Singhji and Jaswant Singhji. I am sure that they will continue to distinguish our public life and parliamentary system with their selfless work in the service of the people.

Thank you.

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I deem it a great privilege to welcome all of you to this function to confer the Outstanding Parliamentarian Awards for the years 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. We are extremely grateful to the Respected President for her kind consent to confer the Awards on the Outstanding Parliamentarians. We are also thankful to our Respected *Up-Rashtrapatiji* and our Respected *Pradhan Mantriji* for their kind presence.

This morning Shri Sharad Pawar, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Shri P. Chidambaram and Shri Mani Shanker Aiyar, are being honoured with the Awards. All of them are accomplished parliamentarians, who have distinguished themselves in our national life through their leadership, knowledge of parliamentary practices and procedures, oratorial skills, and more importantly, their commitment to the finest values that permeate our parliamentary life. I have great pleasure in welcoming them to this function and I heartily compliment each one of them on being chosen as Outstanding Parliamentarian by their own peers.

The Indian Parliamentary Group instituted the Award to promote sound democratic culture and to emphasize on the qualities that a parliamentarian should possess. All the Hon'ble Members who are receiving the Award today, eminently deserve this honour being bestowed upon them.

Shri Sharad Pawar, who has been selected for the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the year 2003, is one of the most accomplished parliamentarians and administrators in the country. Since 1967, when he started his legislative career, he has been a member of the State Legislature of Maharashtra or the national Parliament. A four-time Chief Minister of the State of Maharashtra, one of the senior-most Ministers at the Centre who has headed key Ministries, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and both Houses of the Maharashtra Legislature and a member of various Parliamentary Committees, he has articulated his considered views in our Legislative Chambers and exercised a determining impact on legislative and policy-making processes over the years. Shri Sharad Pawar is held in high esteem by leaders cutting across political affiliations and his informed and well-reasoned speeches in Parliament on diverse issues are heard in rapt attention by all sections of the House. His choice as an Outstanding Parliamentarian is indeed befitting his stature and status.

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* At the function to confer the Outstanding Parliamentarian Awards for the years 2003 to 2006, Central Hall, Parliament House, New Delhi (13 September 2007).

Smt. Sushma Swaraj, who is being conferred the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the year 2004, is well-versed in parliamentary rules and procedures, and has displayed her great debating skills and legal acumen to bear on shaping the tone and tenor of debates in the House. She is always listened to with interest for her ability to marshal facts and cogent arguments. Besides holding various ministerial and other positions in the State of Haryana and the office of the Chief Minister of Delhi, Smt. Sushma Swaraj has also held charge of important Ministries in the Union Government. She has also worked with great commitment in various Parliamentary Committees, leaving a distinctive mark on their functioning. It is a testimony to her outstanding skills as a legislator that she was adjudged the best speaker in the Haryana Legislative Assembly for three consecutive years.

Shri P. Chidambaram, who has rightly been chosen for the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the year 2005, is endowed with those rare qualities which make an eminent and ideal parliamentarian. He is a legal luminary, who is also regarded greatly for his mastery over a wide array of subjects. As a Union Minister holding charge of crucial portfolios, he has impressed all with his administrative skills and initiatives in policy making. He has also been a very proactive member of several Parliamentary Committees. Shri Chidambaram's remarkable articulation, analytical excellence, and respect for parliamentary traditions are indeed highly commendable.

Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, who has been conferred the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the year 2006, is known for his thorough knowledge of the varied dimensions of the issues before the nation and his deep understanding of India and world history. He handles the most complex matters on the floor of the House with consummate ease and great élan. An impressive speaker, he has made a mark for his oratory, flawless diction, quick repartee and his inimitable wit and humour. He has also been a distinguished diplomat, well-known political columnist and author of several acclaimed books. Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar is indeed a worthy choice for the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award.

The Outstanding Parliamentarian Award, instituted by the IPG, underscores the basic postulate of democracy that we all have onerous responsibilities as elected representatives of the people whose trust and faith are paramount in a parliamentary polity. It also warrants that we should go far beyond the confines of our political and social identities to channelize the spirit of the country's progressive vision across the length and breadth of the nation. It is the fundamental duty of parliamentarians to discharge their duties with commitment to the interests of the people. To be effective parliamentarians, the members are required to use various procedural devices and opportunities available to them in a responsible and proactive manner.

It is obvious that our effectiveness as parliamentarians depends much on the sincerity, commitment and ability with which we are able to use various opportunities available in Parliament to influence the Executive action in evolving timely and constructive solutions to the problems that our people face. Only by meaningful participation in parliamentary debates and Committee work, can we truly serve the people. Disruptionist and confrontationist attitude is neither in the interest of the system nor of the people. Of late, unfortunately, there is a perception that the atmosphere in our Legislatures is not in consonance with due discharge of members' duties to the society and that the quality of debates as also the behaviour of our members is not up to the desired level. It is indeed a disturbing trend, which tends to demoralize and dishearten the people at large. If we have to retain the trust of the people in our functioning and the commitment to our democratic structure, we cannot allow such debilitating trends to continue. We should realize that by our proper conduct and behaviour, both inside and outside the Legislatures alone, can we evoke respect and appreciation of the people; otherwise our people, particularly the youth, will lose their faith in our parliamentary system and representative institutions. Unethical conduct and disruptive behaviour, will seriously undermine the very edifice of our democratic structure.

It is in this context that the conferment of the Outstanding Parliamentarian Awards on Shri Sharad Pawar, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Shri P. Chidambaram and Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar assumes added significance. Through their illustrious parliamentary career, each one of them has helped to build on our reputation as the largest working democracy in the world. These distinguished recipients have not only created a distinctive image as parliamentarians but have also been contributing in their own ways to the onward march of parliamentary democracy and towards nation-building. Their many-splendoured service to our parliamentary life will, I am sure, inspire fellow parliamentarians and our younger generations to discharge their duties in a befitting manner, worthy of being people's representatives.

With these words, I once again congratulate the Awardees who all richly deserve this honour and I welcome you all once again to this function.

Thank you.

PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY IN INDIA: PRESENT AND FUTURE*

I am honoured to be here today to deliver the Sixth D.P. Kohli Memorial Lecture. I thank the organizers for inviting me to deliver this important Lecture and share my views on a very topical theme, namely, *Parliamentary Democracy in India—Present and Future*. At the outset, I would like to pay my tributes to the memory of the late Dharamnath Prasad Kohli, an outstanding police officer, who was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in recognition of his long and distinguished service to the nation. D.P. Kohli, the first police officer to adorn the office of the Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation, which he did with great distinction, exemplified those fundamental values of public life which are absolutely essential to sustain and strengthen a parliamentary democratic polity like ours. Renowned for his courage of conviction and farsightedness, he brought to bear the imprint of his personality on an office, which was conceived to uphold integrity in public life. In the process, he set very high standards for his successors to follow. It was his commitment and vision that has helped the CBI emerge as an efficient and effective organization and as the premier investigating agency of the country.

Of particular import to him was probity and integrity, not just in the organization, which he headed, but in the nation as a whole. All of us need to honour officers like D.P. Kohli, who have led by example and lived up to the expectations of all concerned by their remarkable efficiency, unimpeachable integrity and utmost devotion to duty at all times and in all circumstances. I trust that the ideals of D.P. Kohli will continue to inspire the CBI in the discharge of its onerous responsibilities without fear or favour. I must stress that today, what the nation needs most is officers of the stature and commitment of the late D.P. Kohli who had an abiding faith in the cardinal principles of democracy, of good governance, and of Rule of Law, for achieving the ultimate goal of the socio-economic development of our society in full measure.

The subject of my talk is *Parliamentary Democracy in India—Present and Future*. In an increasingly shrinking world, thanks to the remarkable advances

* At the Sixth D.P. Kohli Memorial Lecture on *Parliamentary Democracy in India—Present and Future*, New Delhi (28 April 2005).

in science and technology, no nation is an island; we are all integral parts of a global village. Free flow of information, easy access to communication and faster movement of people across countries and continents have enabled the emergence of a global community with a broader perspective and understanding of the fundamentals of an inclusive society, transparency, probity, Rule of Law and good governance practices – all of them essential components of a successful democratic order. Democracy, which had to surmount many challenges to its survival, over the centuries, has finally emerged triumphant as the most preferred system of governance, testifying to what Franklin Roosevelt said: 'Democracy is not a static thing, it is an everlasting march'. It has not been an easy endeavour, though. The trials and tribulations democracy had to confront during its onward march were many. What facilitated its eventual glory has been its representative character, inherent resilience to cope with the challenges of the times and the demands of native realities. Thus, today, democracy survives, rather thrives, in countries, best suiting their immediate requirements, never compromising, however, on its classical tenets, the most important being its unquestioned subordination to the sovereign will of the people. The content and contours of democracy may vary with countries and climes, but at the center stage of it will inevitably be the people; for, democracy derives its strength and sustenance from the people as a whole.

Friends, as the world moves in to the Third Millennium, the debate of the times mostly revolves around delineating the principles of democratic governance, deepening and consolidating democracy wherever it is already in existence, and making governance effective for sustained human development everywhere, at all times. The focus today is not only on the forms of democracy, but primarily on its substance. As you all know, in what are called established democracies, people are not so much concerned about the institutional arrangements as much as are about what these institutions deliver. It is a fact that democracy is widely advocated and sought after, though with its differently conceived meanings. The nature of the democratic set-up differs with cultural and political differences and with varying stages of socio-economic development of individual countries. We are witness to the remarkable impact of changes in the global political, economic and technological environments, on the nature and form of democracy.

As against social exclusion which itself impairs the quality of democracy by providing a breeding ground for intolerance and repression, inclusive democracy, with its overriding social dimension, has tended to retain popular support across the world. The notion of good governance cannot be appreciated in isolation from any form of democratic governance. At one place, transparency, accountability and performance form the benchmark for authority, legitimacy and good governance; at the same time, democracy is

recognized as the system under which the individuals and their collective aspirations could be met, their interests could be articulated and the civil society movement could be nurtured.

Democracy requires realising in practice a certain set of values relating to institutions and also concerning human rights and to ensure people a voice in their political governance, besides the right to liberty and equality which, are not only necessary to protect the sovereignty of the people but also to ensure an all-pervading and people-oriented political process. That is why accountability and transparency, representation, local democracy and participation, civic association and free media, political and civil rights, free and fair elections, and an independent Judiciary form the bedrock of democracy. The self-corrective nature of democracy is one of its other remarkable attributes. Democracy, which is founded on the right of everyone to take part in the management of public affairs, warrants the existence of representative institutions at all levels and, in particular, a Parliament which represents all shades of opinion and which has the requisite powers and means to express and give substance to the will of the people.

Coming specifically to parliamentary democracy in India—the largest working democracy in the world—the effectiveness of the representative institutions has been successfully tested time and again, amidst a vast diversity prevailing in cultural, linguistic, social and religious spheres. Though parliamentary democracy in the modern sense has been functioning in our country only for the last nearly six decades, our experience of representative institutions is not new. We have had a democratic tradition for long and the freedom struggle brought our democratic ethos and values into a sharper focus. Thus, in the post-Independence era, it was considered that parliamentary democracy was the best suited to our conditions and as such our Founding Fathers opted for a parliamentary democratic polity for our people. During a debate in the Lok Sabha, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru very appropriately asserted that 'we have chosen the system of parliamentary democracy deliberately, because we thought it was in keeping with our own old traditions, not as they were, but adjusted to the new conditions and new surroundings'.

Friends, just as at the core of our national movement for Independence were the democratic ideals of our people, our Founding Fathers bequeathed to us a great Constitution carrying with it our national ethos and features of great democracies of the world. Though Westminster type of parliamentary democracy has been given some space in our Constitution, it would not be correct to presume that our institutions, structures and parliamentary practices and procedures are a replica of the British model. In fact, it is the recognition of our rich democratic heritage and the situation-specific conditions prevailing

in our country, which made for the adoption of the parliamentary system of democracy with a distinctive Indian approach. The British statesman Anthony Eden hailed India's decision to adopt the system of parliamentary democracy thus: 'Of all the experiments in government which have been attempted since the beginning of time, I believe that the Indian venture into parliamentary government is the most exciting. ... The Indian venture is not a pale imitation of our practice at home, but a magnified and multiplied reproduction on a scale we have never dreamt of. If it succeeds, its influence on Asia is incalculable for good. Whatever the outcome, we must honour those who attempt it.'

The Preamble, reflecting the spirit of the Constitution and the broad framework of ideals ingrained in our ancient heritage, declared the resolve of the people to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, and Democratic Republic. Further, it resolves to secure for the people Justice—social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all, Fraternity, assuming the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. The expression 'We the People' amply connotes the essence of the Constitution and the authority of the people in our national affairs.

Friends, by asserting so in the Preamble to the Constitution, our Founding Fathers were keen to lay the foundation of a truly working representative Government under a parliamentary system of democracy to hold the country together, while providing sufficient space for diversities and pluralism to co-exist. The achievement of social and economic democracy as much as political democracy has been one of the prime concerns with the framers of our Constitution. The Constitution codifies a long list of inalienable Fundamental Rights for our citizens. These Fundamental Rights, as you are aware, expressly provide for the right to equality, right to freedom, right to freedom of religion, right against exploitation, cultural and educational rights and the right to constitutional remedies, apart from protection against discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The very purpose of the Fundamental Rights is to create an egalitarian society and to give real meaning to our system of democracy. At the same time, under the scheme of our Constitution, there are certain restrictions which the Government of the day is required to follow in the governance of the country for the common good and for public interest.

Apart from the Fundamental Rights, one of the more important parts of our Constitution lists the Directive Principles of State Policy, which is indeed an agenda for a Welfare State for the realisation of the ideal of social and economic democracy in the country. Article 38 of the Constitution gives very

clear direction in this regard by stating that 'the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of national life'. Thus an important responsibility to take the necessary initiatives to minimize the inequities in income, eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people in different areas or engaged in different vocations was placed on the national leadership by the Constitution itself. This was in line with Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts, which he articulated thus: 'My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest.' As such, the Indian leadership was fully convinced that political freedom without economic and social freedom was incomplete, vulnerable and fragile. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution, also stressed that we must make our political democracy a social democracy as well, a way of life which recognized liberty, equality and fraternity as its essential creeds.

Further envisaged in our Constitution is the scheme of separation of powers and checks and balances among and between the three principal organs of the State - the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. This has, in fact, been recognized as among the characteristic features of our democratic set-up. Ours is a judicious blend of the principle of distribution of powers and the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty in such a manner that we have the best of both, but without the absolute rigidity of either of the two. I would say that this very postulate made our Constitution the supreme law of the land, subjecting all the branches of governance to its overriding authority and control. Yet, as Dr. Ambedkar said: 'The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislatures, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the State depends are the people and the political parties, they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics.' Within this framework of our Constitution are the independence of the Judiciary and the other attributes of parliamentary system of democracy and governance—a competitive party system, free and fair elections, a vigilant and responsible media, and a well-informed citizenry.

Thus, a basic framework is in place in our country to enable parliamentary democracy to flourish under native conditions and to ensure the optimum welfare of the people by providing an enabling environment for securing peace along with development of the country. But to have a perceptive assessment of the subject of today's deliberation, we will have to see how near we are to realizing our goals. The constitutional framework does provide a foundation on which the system is built and which is further strengthened by consolidating and deepening the democratic institutions and parliamentary

processes. As I said earlier, the building of a political democracy could not be the sole object. We have always aspired to establish economic and social democracy in our country. Democracy becomes meaningful only when enabling social, political, economic and legal conditions are created wherein people can exercise their rights and they are free from fear and want. I believe that dignity, dissent and development are the hallmarks of a democracy. But, we must ask ourselves whether, over the years, we have come out successfully through these tests during the process of democratization, as envisaged by our Constitution, and how far we have been able to honour the commitments we made to our people. To venture a look into the future, one has to necessarily assess the achievements and the shortcomings of the past as well as the present.

Friends, no one can dispute the fact that even after more than five decades of freedom, we have not been able to guarantee the basic right to development of our people as is evident from the fact that poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, lack of education, child mortality, unemployment, underemployment, poor health care, intolerance, corruption, violence, lack of character, caste, religious and gender-based prejudices and other weaknesses and infirmities continue to bedevil us, and specially so in the case of the disadvantaged and marginalised sections of society. The condition of the working class in the country is far from satisfactory and, in some sense, appalling. Food, shelter and clothing for all our citizens continue to remain only elusive goals. The basic issues influencing the everyday life of the people, which, though enlisted in the Directive Principles of State Policy, have still to be realised. In fact, several political scientists have argued that under the prevailing circumstances, the Directive Principles should be made enforceable to ensure accountability of the administration.

The widening gap between the rich and the poor is a matter of grave concern. Economic iniquities tend to weaken the national fabric in many ways. Similarly, the increasing chasm between popular expectations and the actual performance of the system is also very distressing. Distributive justice is still a distant dream. Dignified human existence and acceptable levels of socio-economic equity have to be secured on a priority basis for which we have to enforce accountability which is the key element in ensuring good governance at all stages. Accountability essentially requires that the authority is exercised in such a manner which shall meet the obligations to the society, under the law, for obtaining the best results with the right to enforce the same. We should look at democracy not just as a form of Government but more as a way of life and governance.

It is widely held that good governance is essentially participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and

efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the Rule of Law. It also warrants that corruption is minimized, if not eliminated; the views of the minorities and the weaker sections are accommodated; and the voice of the most vulnerable in the society is heard in decision-making. If parliamentary democracy in India is to take deep roots, the key elements of good governance must be practised by all—whether it is the Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary or the active civil society. If we make an assessment of the prevailing state of affairs, we cannot overlook the fact that there is a visible lack of accountability of the governing institutions and individuals and an apparent deficiency of transparency in the decision-making processes. Public administration, and in particular, our administrative apparatus is still not free from the evil of corruption.

What is described as 'criminalisation of politics' remains a problem at hand and we are still to ensure probity in our political and administrative functioning. The politics of exclusion—be it based on caste, creed, sex or religion – poses a serious threat to our unity and integrity. We need to reassert our secular credentials and resolve to create conditions in our country 'when religion will not only be professed and preached and practised freely but will have become a cementing force for binding man to man and not serve as a disturbing and disrupting force dividing and separating,' as prophetically emphasized by Dr. Rajendra Prasad. We cannot also deny the fact that illegal and immoral practices are being used for winning elections by some sections of our political opinion, resulting in the degeneration of the electoral system and eroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity.

Ours is a highly pluralistic society. We need to practise cooperative federalism to make for reconciliation of the urges and aspirations of the people where the Centre and the States would work in cooperation and consultation with each other in the interest of the people and preserve the unity and integrity of the country. I would attribute the lopsided development in the country to our imperfect federal structure and imbalanced distribution of powers between the Centre and the States. I believe that to maintain harmonious relations between the Centre and the States, it is high time that a closer look is given to this crucial aspect. Good governance practices demand that meaningful and effective autonomy is given to the States so that they come out with their own policies and programmes and raise their own resources, keeping in view their needs and according to their capacity.

In spite of our inability and failures in fulfilling people's aspirations on several fronts, it is a remarkable achievement that our people have time and again reposed their faith in the system by participating in the political process. The successful holding of Fourteen General Elections and many more elections to the State Legislative Assemblies, which have seen several changes of

Governments in a peaceful manner, is a clear reflection of the efficacy of the system we have put in place. Over the decades, the character of our parliamentary system has undergone a radical change with a genuinely multi-party system taking deep roots in the country. A distinct coalition culture is slowly emerging which is not a matter to be wary of. What we have to ensure, however, is political stability because frequent elections and uncertainties can be detrimental to the political and economic health of our country.

We are now witness to the emergence of new political realities in the country. It is a healthy development that at the Centre, parties or coalition of parties are forming Governments and several major political parties are sitting in the Opposition. The practice of extending issue-based support from outside without joining the Government is a new phenomenon. But there is responsibility cast on the parties to ensure the smooth functioning of our legislative institutions, otherwise, the basic foundation of our constitutional system will be wrecked. Without functioning legislative institutions, our system of parliamentary democracy will lose the faith and respect of the people, ultimately, giving rise to cynicism and tension, which cannot but weaken the entire constitutional edifice. In order to promote and further consolidate democracy, the Ruling and the Opposition Parties in Parliament and in the State Legislatures should see themselves as partners in the development of the democratic process. The Opposition should not oppose just for the sake of opposition but must display a creative and meaningful attitude of constructive opposition keeping the larger national interest in mind rather than for scoring narrow political points, as much as the Ruling Party or combine is required to show greater sensitivity towards Parties and view-points opposed to its own. Otherwise, the very basis of our system of democracy will be seriously called into question. As Gandhiji rightly said: 'Evolution of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the doors of reason when we refuse to listen to our opponents or, having listened, make fun of them. If intolerance becomes a habit, we run the risk of missing the truth.'

During the last over five decades, our Parliament has passed many progressive, social and economic legislations to address the concerns of different sections of society. Special emphasis has been laid on the issues relating to human dignity and Fundamental Rights of the citizens. The Parliament has also created mechanisms specifically for the well-being of the disadvantaged sections of society. The National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Women, the National Commissions for Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, the National Commissions for Minorities and Backward Classes, are all creations of Parliament. Our Parliament has also taken various initiatives to further promote openness

and transparency in the administration by enabling citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities. As you all are aware, the strengthening of the process of ensuring Executive accountability through a comprehensive Committee System has enhanced the role of Parliament by providing a new meaning and content to the concepts of parliamentary surveillance.

It will, indeed, be difficult to perceive of any other alternative to parliamentary democracy as the system of governance of our country. There is a body of opinion which talks of a perceptible decline in the stature of the institution of our Parliament. This is a perception which needs to be looked into in all earnest. As you all know, over the years, the complexion of Parliament has changed with it becoming more representative of a wide cross section of our society. Our Parliament has been extremely responsive to the aspirations of our people in manifold ways. I would assert that in spite of political and ideological differences, there has been consensus and unanimity of opinion in our Parliament with regard to many of the major national issues with the ultimate objective of furthering the welfare of the people and the development of the nation.

Friends, what is to be borne in mind is that, ultimately, Parliament is the supreme representative institution of the country. The Houses are composed by representatives elected by the people themselves. Parliamentarians are the harbingers of change in varied ways. The Parliament today is not merely a law-making body. It performs a wide variety of roles, including grievance ventilation and its redressal, moulding of public opinion, ensuring accountability, providing leadership to the society, etc. It also functions as a safety valve, enabling articulation of ideals and issues on its floors, and thus preventing crises situations from spilling over on to the streets. In the process, Parliament helps to inculcate confidence in the people and also to sustain people's faith in the system.

The passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to our Constitution, which is a step towards decentralization, has created a new horizon for direct democracy and social transformation. Through this silent revolution of establishing grassroots democracy in India, people have now an opportunity to raise their voice and find place in the developmental process. The greatest of benefits which local self-governance offers to the people, to my mind, is that a large number of women, dalits and other marginalised classes have come to be part of the processes of decision making and thus of the governance structure. Each Panchayat election throws up many women leaders with active, articulate women backing and supporting them. Thus, a large number of women who had earlier been outside the realm of political participation now have secured a place in elected offices in the local bodies in rural as well

as urban India. This poses a new challenge for us to ensure that their capacities and skills are consistently upgraded and they are adequately prepared to face the challenges that lie ahead of them. This assumes special importance when many of the schemes implemented by the Government for poverty alleviation and for provision of education, health, water supply and other basic services to the people, have been placed under the domain of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

We need to urgently look into many other issues to preserve and protect democracy. To my mind, of particular importance is imparting education to our people. All efforts should be made to root out illiteracy from the country. With literacy and education, we can build an informed electorate and an informed democracy. With it will also come leaders of character and calibre; we will also be able to secure gender parity, empowerment, and respect for dissent. An informed public will also be more civic conscious and will contribute towards sustainable development, environmental protection and population-related problems. They will also be fully conscious of their rights as also of their duties to the nation.

In the changing world of globalization, we would do well to guard against its negative impact. While we go in for economic reforms, we should ensure that such measures are consistent with our national interests and are implemented with a human face. Our national interests should also bear upon our relations with the rest of the world, especially with our neighbours and the developing world. India has always championed the cause of peace, progress and democracy everywhere and has been in the forefront in voicing the concerns of the developing world. We should continue to play a proactive role *vis-à-vis* the global community in our best national interests and in the interest of a larger, less exploitative and peaceful world order.

Friends, the thrust of democracy as a form of governance should be, among other things, on empowering people. If we talk of deepening democracy, we must meet the central challenge of strengthening the key institutions of democratic governance and promoting democratic politics. We need to focus our attention specially on expanding the capabilities of our people to realize their full potential by extending health-care, value-based education and increased employment opportunities. We shall be on the way to further consolidate democracy when our people are convinced of the efficacy of the core institutions and instrumentalities of our democratic political society like the Legislatures, elections, electoral laws and political leadership.

There are a number of institutional, policy and behavioural changes which make for democratic consolidation. Improved governance can be achieved by strengthening state capacity, rationalizing economic structures with a

human face, eradicating corruption, by securing social and political order while maintaining basic freedoms, improving horizontal accountability and the Rule of Law. The process of consolidation of democracy gets accelerated with the improvement in the representative functions of democratic governance, enhancement of public accountability of Legislatures and local self-governments, and with the active participation of the civil society and the cooperation of a truly free, vigilant and responsible media. All organs of the State—the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary, and its Fourth Estate, the Media—have to endeavour in harmony to secure and safeguard democracy. In particular, the constitutional scheme of separation of powers and checks and balances should be preserved. Each organ would do well to respect the others' jurisdiction and responsibilities and function within the constitutionally ordained scheme of things.

The Legislature and the Media are two of the pivotal pillars on which rests the edifice of a parliamentary democracy. We have the freedom of Press implicit in the Fundamental Right of the 'freedom of speech and expression' guaranteed to the citizens under article 19(1)(a) of our Constitution. We have extended various facilities to the Media persons to enable them to cover the proceedings of the Parliament in a true and non-partisan manner. Further, the televising and broadcasting of proceedings have brought the institution of Parliament nearer to the people. It is this recognition that made us start two separate channels for the live telecast of the proceedings of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. It is of crucial importance that Parliament and the Media work together, taking advantage of the developments in the field of information and communication technologies, to help evolve an informed citizenry and an informed democracy.

Friends, as I said earlier, we still have a long way to go in realizing the vision of our Founding Fathers. We need to continue to strive hard to make our democracy relevant for large sections of our people. We should not, however, let our failings and failures dampen our enthusiasm for democracy. For sustaining democracy, we must address the concerns of the common people and celebrate our success in consolidating democracy. The negative public perception of politics and of those in public life should not be permitted to cloud the minds of the younger generations. They should be made aware of the enduring promise of democracy and of their important role in preserving and nurturing the same by their active participation in the political processes. The dialogue on democracy should be an endless one, because the self-corrective nature of democracy enables it to overcome the challenges before the system.

Parliamentary democracy in our country faces many challenges, both internal and external. Of prime importance is the quality and calibre of our leaders and the integrity of our system. It is said that in the early years of a

Republic, it is the leaders who create institutions, but later these institutions are expected to provide leaders. It is our good fortune that we have had outstanding leaders to guide our nascent Republic who built and bequeathed to us our institutions of governance. It is now for us, who are working these institutions, to provide leaders for the future generations. The integrity of our institutions as also of our leaders will be a crucial factor determining the future of democracy in the country. If lack of integrity and indiscipline creep in to our institutions and leaders, our democracy will flounder. If integrity becomes the hallmark of our system as a whole, we will continue to hold our head high among the comity of nations as the largest working democracy in the world.

Every citizen of our country should be made to feel that he or she is an important part of our democratic functioning and has a role in strengthening the system of parliamentary democracy. Transparency and probity should permeate the functioning of each and every organ and authority in the country. Corruption, in all its forms, has to be fought relentlessly and weeded out. There has to be exemplary behaviour on the part of all functionaries—be they part of the Executive or Legislature or the Judiciary.

The legislators in our country have the special responsibility of respecting adequately and faithfully the verdict of the people, who are the real masters in a democracy. If they themselves show lack of effective and dignified commitment to parliamentary behaviour and are perceived to be self-seekers and unconcerned about the discharge of their responsibility, the people, specially the youth who are our future leaders, will lose faith in the system as a whole, resulting ultimately in total chaos which, in turn, will be the harbinger of authoritarianism, the ultimate victims of which again will be the people themselves.

I call upon all concerned to try their best to ensure that our democratic institutions, particularly, the Parliament and the Assemblies, collectively function, as the most important bodies representing the people, and the individual members discharge their duties in a dignified manner, as the custodians of the people's faith in the largest parliamentary democracy in the world. Our laws should also contain adequate provisions to deal with legislators who fail to live up to the expectations of the people and indulge in demeaning behaviour ignoring norms of probity and rectitude. I urge all to consider whether we should not give to our people the right to recall their elected representatives, if the situation so demands.

Today the people and the Parties are increasingly talking of what is called 'the criminalisation of politics', but hardly do anything to remove the stigma from our body politic. I appeal to all political parties not to involve any one, perceived to have questionable antecedents, in the electoral process. At the same time, it is essential that our justice system should ensure that no one in

public life be made targets of mischievous and untenable charges and allegations and, if so charged, should be able to get redressal at the earliest so as not to deny them their legitimate right of participation in the political processes.

Our justice-delivery system, particularly, the criminal justice system, has an important role to play in cleansing our body politic. Mounting cases and slow movement of the judicial process make for a distressing scenario where pendency becomes the order of the day. Lamenting the state of affairs, Nani Palkhiwala once said:

> If I were asked to mention the greatest drawback of the administration of justice in India today, I would say that it is delay ... . Our cases drag over a length of time which makes eternity intelligible. The law may or may not be an ass, but in India it is certainly a snail and our cases proceed at a pace which would be regarded as unduly slow in a community of snails. Justice has to be blind but I see no reason why it should also be lame: here it just hobbles along, barely able to walk.

The right to speedy trial, the Fundamental Right spelt out by the Supreme Court, under article 21 of the Constitution, has been unable to ensure speedy disposal of cases. More than twenty-five years ago, in 1979, the Supreme Court, in the *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar case*, made it clear that 'speedy trial is of essence to criminal justice and there can be no doubt that the delay in trial by itself constitutes denial of justice'. To my mind, such gross delay in justice delivery tantamount to denial of justice, ultimately undermining the concept of Rule of Law itself. This is an aspect which cannot brook any further delay in finding solution. Otherwise, our law-enforcement system itself will come into question. Autonomous bodies like the CBI cannot function effectively, if its efforts remain inconclusive. As no innocent citizen should be harassed or hounded, a guilty person should not go unpunished either because of our dilatory criminal justice delivery system.

We have to build up new institutions and strengthen the existing ones to tackle effectively, if not to eliminate, the serious aberrations and distortions in our society. Corruption, favouritism, lack of probity and misuse of authority—are some of the many problems hindering the country's progress and development and accentuating the peoples' woes. The country has to declare a war against such anti-people activities and cannot afford to make any compromises. In this endeavour, organization like the CBI has to play its assigned role with steadfast determination and commitment. The reputation of CBI as an efficient organization is not only to be maintained but enhanced by result-oriented activities. It should be a tool for fighting against crime and misdemeanors to cleanse the society, and not for perpetuating injustice and victimization.

Today a substantial section of our population as also the members of our Parliament belong to the post-Independence generation. It is important for them to remember that great sacrifices of generations before them had gone into our struggle for freedom and in laying the institutional foundations of our Republic. We should not undermine their importance by promoting hatred, negativism and divisiveness among our people and by weakening our institutions of governance. Only in the hands of a united and an eternally vigilant citizenry will our democracy be safe. A great responsibility is thus cast upon all of us in sustaining parliamentary democracy, our freedom and democratic rights, and, more than anything else, in sustaining our people's faith in the institutions of our democracy. If we all faithfully discharge those responsibilities, nothing can ever undermine it. Reminding the American youth of the value of their Constitution for posterity, one of the greatest American Jurists, Mr. Joseph Story said:

> Let the American youth never forget that they possess (in their Constitution) a noble inheritance, bought by the toils and sufferings and blood of their ancestors and capable, if wisely improved, and faithfully guarded, of transmitting to their latest posterity all the substantial blessings of life, the peaceful enjoyment of liberty, property, religion, and independence.... It may, nevertheless, perish in an hour by the folly, or corruption, or negligence of its only keepers, THE PEOPLE. Republics are created... by the virtue, public spirit, and intelligence of the citizens. They fall, when the wise are banished from the public councils, because they dare to be honest, and the profligate are rewarded, because they flatter the people, in order to betray them.

This is an eternal message and applies to all democracies.

The late D.P. Kohli, while addressing the CBI Officers once said:

> 'The public expects the highest standards from you both in efficiency and integrity. That faith has to be sustained.' I believe what D.P. Kohli told your colleagues holds equally true for all of us who are part and parcel of the governance structure of the country. Should efficiency and integrity and commitment to larger national causes permeate all our actions, as emphasized by late D.P. Kohli, we can rest assured that our parliamentary democracy will have a very safe, secure and resplendent future and, through it, our country, full of talent and opportunities, can occupy the topmost position in the comity of nations.

Thank you for your patient hearing.

CHANGING PROFILE OF LEGISLATURES*

It is indeed my privilege to welcome you all to the 69th All India Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India at our Capital City. Before I proceed further, I have the sad duty to refer to the passing away of some of our esteemed colleagues, who, at one time or the other, belonged to our fraternity. They are: Shri Rebala Dasaratha Rami Reddy, former Speaker, Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly; Shri Mirigendra Pratap Singh, former Speaker, Jharkhand Legislative Assembly; Shri Manindra Lal Bhowmik, former Speaker, Tripura Legislative Assembly; and Shri Ramchandra Maheshwari, former Deputy Speaker, Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly. I pay my respectful homage to their memory.

Since its inception in 1921, over the decades, the Conference of Presiding Officers has evolved into a vibrant and effective forum, keeping pace with the changing needs of our Legislatures and emerging dimensions of our parliamentary polity. To begin with, way back in the 1920s and 1930s, the object of the Conference was essentially to secure the appropriate co-ordination of parliamentary procedures throughout India. But, especially after Independence, many significant changes have taken place in the powers and functions of the Legislatures and in consonance with that, the aims, objects and scope of the Conference also kept on widening. Today, this is the forum for discussing matters relating not only to parliamentary practices and procedures but also various other issues having a vital significance for our parliamentary democratic system. Our Conferences have gone a long way in establishing sound democratic conventions and parliamentary practices and procedures in our legislative bodies.

Friends, as you all know, we met less than a year ago in Kolkata in October 2004. Soon after, we again met at an Emergent Conference in New Delhi in April 2005 in the wake of the Supreme Court's interim order of 9 March 2005 on Writ Petition (Civil) No.123/2005 filed by Shri Arjun Munda. As Chairman of the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, I felt that the directions issued by the Supreme Court related to matters under the Rules of Procedure of the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly. I also felt that by virtue of well established parliamentary conventions, these

* At the inauguration of the 69th Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, New Delhi (30 July 2005).

were within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Presiding Officer of the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly or for that matter, the House itself.

Let me once again reiterate that the political developments in the State of Jharkhand were not my concern at all when I decided to convene the Emergent Conference. My prime consideration, as the Presiding Officer of the highest Legislative Body in the country, was the erosion of the independence of the Legislature. I desired that the Conference should discuss how the Legislatures and Presiding Officers should address the issue if the courts continue to pass such orders. The Conference had lengthy deliberations in the matter and Presiding Officers expressed deep concern over such orders being passed repeatedly by the courts, which tended to disturb the delicate balance of power between the Legislature and the Judiciary. They also felt that such orders, besides amounting to transgression by the Judiciary into the exclusive domain of the Legislatures, tended to undermine the dignity of the Legislatures and their Presiding Officers. The Resolution that the Emergent Conference adopted unanimously stressed that there must exist mutual trust and respect between the Legislature and the Judiciary and also an understanding that they are not acting at cross purposes but striving together to achieve the same goal, that is to serve the common man. The Resolution emphasized that the success of democratic governance would be greatly facilitated if these two important institutions respect each other's role in the national endeavour and do not transgress into areas assigned to them by the Constitution. It is this spirit of harmony among the organs of State, which can help nourish and sustain our nation as the largest working democracy in the world.

After the Kolkata Conference, we have had as many as nine Presiding Officers joining our fraternity. They are: Shri Francisco Sardinha, Speaker, Goa Legislative Assembly; Sardar H.S. Chatha, Speaker, Haryana Vidhan Sabha; Shri Inder Singh Namdhari, Speaker, Jharkhand Legislative Assembly; Shri V.R. Sudarshan, Chairman, Karnataka Legislative Council; Shri Krishnarao Rakhamajirao Desai *alias* Babasaheb Kupekar, Speaker, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly; Shri Takar Marde, Deputy Speaker, Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly; Shri Azad Mohammed, Deputy Speaker, Haryana Vidhan Sabha; Shri N.V. Gopalakrishna, Deputy Speaker, Karnataka Legislative Assembly; and Shri Khot Sachidananda, Deputy Chairman, Karnataka Legislative Council.

On behalf of all of you and on my own behalf, I extend a hearty welcome to each one of them on joining our fraternity and also welcome them to this Conference. I would also like to place on record our profound appreciation of the valuable contributions made by those colleagues who have demitted office since our Kolkata meet.

Friends, as per practice, let me now recapitulate some of the significant developments that have taken place in the parliamentary arena since the Conference in Kolkata. During this period, the Third and the Fourth Sessions of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha were held and the Fifth Session has just begun. The Third Session commenced on 1 December 2004 and concluded on 23 December 2004 and had 17 sittings spread over 103 hours. As the Session progressed, it was observed that too many notices were being given by the Hon'ble members for raising various issues during the so-called 'Zero Hour', leading to disruption of business. Therefore, I observed that the number of 'Zero Hour' matters may be restricted to about 15 per day and unless matters of emergent national or international importance are involved, each member may be allowed to raise not more than one matter per week.

Subsequently, pursuant to a decision arrived at the Leaders' Meeting held on 20 April 2005, an attempt was made to further streamline the raising of matters during the 'Zero Hour'. The notices for raising such matters can now be given by 09.30 hours on the day on which the matter is proposed to be raised instead of 10.00 hours as was fixed earlier. Also, with a view to enabling more Hon'ble members to raise important issues under Rule 377, the number of matters to be raised has now been increased from 15 to 20 per day.

The Fourth Session of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha commenced on 25 February 2005 and concluded on 13 May 2005. In all, the House sat for 38 days spread over 211 hours. During the Session, the House unfortunately witnessed disorderly scenes and pandemonium, resulting in adjournments for several days. The main Opposition Party along with some of its allies remained absent from the House from 27 April 2005. To keep the House going, and persuade the Hon'ble members to come back to the House, I held meetings with the Leaders of Parties every day before the commencement of the sitting of the Lok Sabha.

I also started a practice of making an observation in the House every week informing members about the business transacted in the preceding week, mainly to apprise all of them of the work done by the House and the time lost due to forced adjournments and interruptions. Along with this, from 27 April 2005, I also started a practice of convening every morning a meeting of the Leaders of all the Parties and Groups to discuss urgent issues likely to be raised by them in the House.

Coming to some procedural developments, you may recall that with a view to making the role of the Departmentally Related Standing Committees more meaningful, a new Direction 73A was added in the *Directions by the Speaker* which provides that the Minister concerned shall make a statement

in the House once in six months regarding the status of implementation of the recommendations of the DRSCs with regard to his Ministry. The purpose of the new Direction is to highlight the qualitative aspects of the actual status of implementation of the recommendations. In pursuance of this Direction, 27 statements were made by the concerned Ministers during the Third and the Fourth Sessions.

In an important procedural development, sub-rule (2) of Rule 72 of the *Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha* was amended. Earlier, for opposing the introduction of a Bill, members were not required to give any reason while tabling the notice. Over the time, a need was felt to make it mandatory to give reasons for the same as it would facilitate not only its smooth admissibility but would also enable the Ministers concerned to come prepared on the subject. Hence, the said sub-rule was amended to insert the required provision.

Similarly, Rule 331H(c) provides that 'the Committee shall make Report on the Bills in the given time'. However, no time limit for submission of the Report was normally prescribed, except in the case of Bills of a very emergent nature. To address this issue, I have ordered that at the time of reference, the Standing Committees may be requested to make a Report on the Bill within three months of the date of reference. Where a specific request is received from the Minister concerned for early presentation of Report, or in such other cases where the Presiding Officers consider that the Report be made in a shorter time, they may prescribe time limit shorter than three months. In view of these orders, Standing Committees are now being requested for report on Bills within three months from the date of reference. The Committees may, however, seek extension of time for presentation of Report from the Presiding Officers if they require more than three months' time for the purpose.

As you all know, the need to regulate the tours undertaken by the Parliamentary Committees has been engaging the attention of the Presiding Officers for some time. The number of tours undertaken in a year by each Committee, the necessity of these tours, the cumulative impact of all the tours in the resources of the organizations which finance them and many related issues have been looked into from time to time. A new set of guidelines regarding bearing of expenditure by the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha Secretariats on study tours have now been finalized in consultation with the Chairman, Rajya Sabha. The new guidelines, *inter alia*, provide that, henceforth, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha Secretariats shall bear expenditure on board, lodging and transport, etc. for members and officers accompanying the Parliamentary Committees. Consequently, the practice of incurring expenditure by the Ministries/Government Organisations/PSUs on study tours of Parliamentary Committees has been discontinued. The new guidelines have come into force with effect from 18 May 2005.

As regards some other significant parliamentary developments, a landmark was achieved in the history of telecasting of parliamentary proceedings on 14 December 2004 when two separate dedicated Satellite Channels were launched for the live telecast of the entire proceedings of the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha nationwide. This would, no doubt, go a long way in promoting transparency in the working of the House and taking Parliament closer to the people of our country.

Friends, I am sure, you are all well aware of the crucial importance of the conservation of our nation's natural resources in general and water resources in particular. This issue of conservation of water came up before the House on 22 March 2005 while commemorating the World Water Day when four members made submissions. Associating with the views of these members, I urged the House as well as the Government to be concerned about finding ways and means of conserving rainwater. On my part, I have offered the premises of the Parliament House and the Speaker's House in Delhi and my residence in Kolkata for rainwater harvesting. I have also asked the concerned Ministries to take up the project of providing facilities for harvesting rainwater in all the residential and official premises under the control of the Speaker. I shall take up this matter with the concerned Ministry for the inclusion of offering rainwater harvesting systems under the MPLAD Scheme. I have also decided to constitute a Parliamentary Forum on Water so that we can effectively discuss the problems in a structured manner and can discharge our obligations to the nation with a result-oriented approach.

The Tsunami tragedy, which caused havoc in several countries of South-East Asia, also ravaged our coastal States of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as well. Towards relief and rehabilitation in the affected areas, we, at the parliamentary level, have contributed generously from the MPLAD Scheme funds. The Committee on MPLADS has instructed that the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation should monitor and coordinate the release and utilization of funds in consultation with the concerned authorities.

In our ceaseless endeavours to honour eminent parliamentarians and national leaders, the statues of Acharya Narendra Deva, Shri A.K. Gopalan and Shri S.A. Dange were unveiled in the Parliament Complex on 10 December 2004. Earlier, portraits of Sarvashri Subramaniam Bharathi, Sarat Chandra Bose, Tridib Kumar Chaudhuri and Vasudev Balwant Phadke were unveiled on 3 December 2004.

At another function held on 21 March 2005, the Hon'ble President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, conferred the Outstanding Parliamentarian Awards instituted by the Indian Parliamentary Group on Shri L.K. Advani, MP (1999);

Shri Arjun Singh, MP (2000); Shri Jaswant Singh, MP (2001); and Dr. Manmohan Singh, MP (2002).

The Committee of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies on Telecasting of the Proceedings of Legislatures had examined various aspects of telecasting of the proceedings of our legislative bodies, including funds, manpower, transmission, etc. in detail. The Conference at Kolkata adopted the report of the Committee. The Committee felt that it would be extremely difficult for the State Governments and Legislatures to mobilize the resources required for setting up of permanent infrastructure facilities and for meeting recurring operational expenses. The Committee, therefore, recommended that the Planning Commission and the Union Ministry of Finance might be requested to respond positively by agreeing to provide funds required for telecasting of the proceedings of Legislatures on a sharing basis between the Centre and the States. Accordingly, we have approached the Planning Commission and the Union Ministry of Finance requesting them to meet the expenditure required for setting up infrastructure facilities for live telecast of the proceedings of the State Legislatures.

Friends, the subjects for discussion at the Conference this time are 'Accountability of the Executive' and 'National E-Governance Plan', selected on demands from some of our colleagues from the State Legislatures. The topics slated for discussions are interrelated, one reinforcing the other. Securing Executive accountability to the Legislature is one of the cardinal principles of parliamentary democracy. Making use of the remarkable advancements in information and communications technology, e-governance substantially facilitates enforcing transparency and in promoting Executive accountability. The subjects for discussion are, therefore, of much contemporary relevance.

As you all know, the concept of Executive accountability to the Legislature is as old as parliamentary democracy itself. In a parliamentary set-up such as ours, accountability of the Executive has several aspects. It is primarily aimed at ensuring that the Government of the day performs to the best of its ability for public good. The policies and programmes of the Executive are constantly subjected to parliamentary scrutiny. We have introduced several innovations in the practices and procedures relating to the working of the two Houses with a view to safeguarding Executive accountability to the Legislature and bringing in more transparency in governance. Among these, the Parliamentary Committees have been an integral and inseparable part of the system. What is most significant is that the Committees examine Action Taken notes received from the Ministries/Departments and Action Taken Reports thereon are presented to the Houses. In this direction, the role of the Committee on Government Assurances, which is an innovation of our Parliament, as also that of the Departmentally Related Standing Committees,

is pivotal. We have to focus on how to enhance this accountability factor by strengthening our Committee System and securing implementation of Government assurances in the process.

Insofar as e-governance is concerned, the Government of India has approved the National E-governance Action Plan for implementation during the year 2003-2007. The Action Plan seeks to lay the foundation and provide impetus for long-term growth of e-governance in the country. The Plan also seeks to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms, set up core infrastructure and policies; it also implements a number of Mission-Mode Projects at the Centre, State and integrated service levels to create a citizen-centric and business-centric environment for governance. Legislatures being the supreme institutions of democracy provide an important forum for debate, discussion and above all for policy formulation and scrutiny of Executive functioning. Essentially, as institutions representing the will of the people, they need to be closer to and well connected with each other. In view of the crucial importance of information storage, dissemination and sharing, both among themselves and between the State Legislatures and the Parliament, it would be appropriate that we have a well-developed information management system and Local Area Network (LAN)/Wide Area Network (WAN) connectivity within the Legislature and connectivity to the Parliament of India. We have the Parliament of India Home Page, which disseminates information on many aspects of the functioning of our Parliament. Most of our State Legislatures have also created their own websites. As you know, the website on 'Legislative Bodies in India', developed by the Lok Sabha Secretariat and launched during the Presiding Officers' Conference at Kolkata, is indeed a major step forward in sharing of information among the Legislatures. During the deliberations on the theme 'National E-Governance Plan' we can further explore as to how to make use of the advancements in information and communications technology in the parliamentary realm.

My fellow Presiding Officers, the people of India have time and again reposed their abiding and unwavering faith in parliamentary democracy. It is in our legislative bodies that the sovereign will of the people finds its resounding echo and full expression. The wide array of diversities that we have in our society, as also the political, economic and social compulsions of the day, are bound to get reflected in the Chambers of our Legislatures. In a vibrant and pulsating democracy like ours, it is but natural that some heat and dust are generated on the floors of the Legislatures, especially in an era of coalition politics. As Presiding Officers, all of us have to facilitate the smooth and orderly conduct of business of the House. We have to enable the members to raise issues of topical importance, of course within the rules laid down for the purpose. We also have to let all sections of the House participate meaningfully in the proceedings. As custodians of the rights and privileges

of the House and its members, we have a very challenging task at hand, which warrants a judicious blend of wisdom, dignity and commitment to the highest ideals of parliamentary democracy. I am confident that all of us will ceaselessly endeavour to safeguard the pride and prestige of our legislative bodies and uphold the highest traditions of parliamentary Democracy so that we may serve the people, who are the real masters. I look forward to very fruitful deliberations here today. With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Conference.

Thank you very much.

MAKING DEMOCRACY RELEVANT FOR THE COMMON MAN*

I feel greatly privileged and honoured to be here today to deliver the V.K. Krishna Menon Memorial Lecture. It is a great opportunity to be amidst this distinguished gathering and I thank the Krishna Menon Memorial Society for inviting me to deliver this prestigious Lecture and share my views on a very topical theme, 'Making Democracy Relevant for the Common Man'. The benign presence of Respected Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer at this function is indeed a testimony to the relevance of V.K. Krishna Menon's ideas and ideals in today's world as also the topicality of the theme of the Lecture. I am immensely grateful to him for extending me this honour of being here and to deliver the Lecture this evening.

At the outset, I would like to pay my tributes to the memory of the late V.K. Krishna Menon, a man of deep intellectual convictions, an impassioned patriot, an eminent parliamentarian, an outstanding statesman, a brilliant orator, a diplomat and negotiator *non pareil*, a fine human being, and, above all, one of the most fascinating personalities of modern India. His was an interesting combination of reason and emotion and logic and passion. In his life, he was always frank and forthright and did not hide his emotions nor hesitate to speak out his mind. He never compromised on his beliefs and convictions either. He was a non-conformist and a rebel in every sense of the term. No wonder that the establishment misunderstood him more often than not—not that it affected Menon! As Anatoli Lunacharsky observed about Lenin: "He never glanced in the mirror of History, never even thought what posterity would think of him, but simply did his work".

Krishna Menon, the intellectual giant that he was, too, never bothered how history will judge him. Endowed with luminous intellect, an enormous sense of objectivity and an incisive world view, he just went about doing a great job of everything he came to associate with. Thus, Krishna Menon's dedicated and invaluable services to the Borough Council of St. Pancras while he was in London brought him the honour of the 'Freedom of the Borough', a great accolade of British Municipal life. The only other person so honoured was none other than George Bernard Shaw!

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* At the V.K. Krishna Menon Memorial Lecture on *Making Democracy Relevant for the Common man*, Ernakulam, Kerala (6 August 2005).

Though Krishna Menon held high offices in public life, he essentially belonged to the world of scholars and intellectuals. A Professor of the eminence of Harold Laski, had described Menon as the best student he had ever had. In fact, Prof. Laski's best compliment to Menon came at another occasion when he said: "I have taught Krishna Menon but it was not always he who was at the receiving end". As you might be aware, similar sentiments were expressed by his Philosophy teacher, Prof. Spearman also when he said: "Krishna Menon was a man of extraordinary ability and exceptional energy. Unless I am mistaken he is destined to become a man of worth". Undoubtedly, the prophetic words of both Laski and Spearman came true in the years that ensued when Krishna Menon strode like a colossus in the great Assemblies and Councils across the world.

As a freedom fighter and as a spokesman of the Freedom Movement in Europe, Krishna Menon proved himself to be a speaker of extraordinary perception and an organizer par excellence. He effectively used his association with the British Labour Party, to expose the contradictions in their commitment to socialism, freedom and democracy. At one of the Labour Party Conferences, he said, ".....Let it be faced frankly that socialism in Britain cannot be built on the basis of imperialism abroad. This is still the crux of the Indian problem." His relentless campaigns in the United Kingdom had a very positive bearing on the National Movement in India.

In the post-Independence period, he rendered yeoman's service to the nation by brilliantly and passionately articulating our cause in the world fora, particularly at the United Nations. As a Union Minister with a special interest in foreign policy and international relations, Krishna Menon contributed greatly towards India emerging as a spokesman of the developing world and in articulating the Third World's concerns and considerations in the international bodies. His administrative acumen was manifest in the portfolios he held as a Union Minister. As a respected parliamentarian, he very forcefully spoke on the floor of both the Houses of Parliament on a wide array of issues of national and international importance. He, like his close and most trusted friend, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, had a deep and abiding faith in the efficacy of parliamentary democracy for India. Once Krishna Menon reacted very strongly to a suggestion that Parliament (the Lok Sabha) must be dissolved in the wake of the Indo-Pak conflict in 1971. He said:

> I hope the Prime Minister will at no time heed the counsel of unwisdom which says the Parliament must go. That proceeds on the assumption that Parliament is a luxury which we tolerate....Parliament is a necessary establishment, in order that in case there would be reverse ... there can be no war without reverses, except in the thinking of people, the Parliament can act as a safety valve on such occasions....

As a jurist, we saw Menon practising in the Supreme Court as a Senior Advocate, imbued with progressive ideas. This legal luminary always preferred to take up working class matters for securing justice for the much exploited labour class, without charging any fee whatsoever. I fully agree with what Respected Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer once said, in his inimitable language, about Menon's legal career that 'great human causes, not petty problems find the jurist in him... he is halting in humdrum areas but heroic in the higher values of our legal political system'. Friends, let us today pay our homage to that great man who had the distinction of carrying so many shining attributes in his personality.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the task of reminding the new generation of Krishna Menon's legacy has been taken over by none other than Respected Justice Krishna Iyer, whose claim to eminence is not any less than that of the one in whose honour we are meeting this evening. Justice Krishna Iyer himself is one of the rare personalities of our time, marked with the distinction of generating activism with restraint, practising politics with principle and attaining scholarship permeated by humanism. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Justice Iyer has transformed Indian jurisprudence and democratized our judicial process by imparting new dimensions of compassionate humanism to the Rule of Law.

His observations on the Bombay High Court Order of 7 May 1997, on a so called 'Public Interest Litigation', to evict a large number of helpless slum-dwellers from public property, that 'only judicial field-marshals, with military flair and militant mood, can conceive of such *in terrorem* commands...', unmistakably conveyed his anger, concern and frustration with the declining value system of the judiciary today. Elsewhere he had also cautioned against the tendency to equate public interest with the interest of the class to which the judges themselves belonged. It is indeed a tall order for any one to comprehend his commendable contributions to our judicature and its significant potential in delivering justice. Permit me to say that V.K. Krishna Menon and V.R. Krishna Iyer, the two great sons of Kerala, elevated our intellectual life and enriched our public discourse in more ways than one.

Friends, coming to the theme of today's Lecture, Making Democracy Relevant to the Common Man, an obvious question that emerges is what is the relevance of democracy if it does not make any difference to the common man? The effectiveness of any Government, to my mind, is judged on the basis of the impact it makes on the lives of those who need the Government the most.

The greatest challenge on the Founding Fathers, in the wake of freedom, was to come up with a viable system of government that would reflect and

represent the diversities of India and at the same time constructively govern it for the years to come. We finally adopted a parliamentary democratic system, after a great deal of debate, with the conviction that it best suited us. Our people and their leadership had great expectations from it, in spite of the fact that the world around us was quite sceptical about our ability to successfully operate a democratic system. We can take legitimate pride in the fact that in laying the institutional foundations of our Republic we have made remarkable progress.

Our most significant achievement of the independence, to my mind, is that we have sustained a parliamentary democratic system, with all its imperfections. Having successfully come through Fourteen General Elections and experienced a good degree of political stability for over five and half decades, no one today would dispute that Indian democracy has come of age and that democracy is here to stay, which clearly establishes the maturity of the Indian electorate.

The institution that has contributed the most to the consolidation and strengthening of democracy in the country is our Parliament. Over the years, our Parliament has come to be identified, both in theory and in practice, to be the pivot of our political system. The responsibility for providing direction, momentum and the institutions for social engineering in India has been on our Parliament.

On the social front, Independent India had to undertake the delicate task of having to blend tradition with modernity, customs with the laws, to bring reason to prevail over superstitions and reconcile issues of faith with the demands of modern administration and governance. Perhaps the biggest and the most complex issue that India had to address, on the social front, was the issue of the political, social and economic exclusion of a significant segment of our population and the ways and means for their empowerment by bringing them into our national mainstream. These seemingly impossible tasks, precipitated by historical forces, were sought to be achieved by taking recourse to progressive legislation and by adopting a policy of protective discrimination. Today, we are distinctly recognised in the world community for our democratic and secular values and for establishing the foundations for an inclusive and modern social order.

On the economic front, we have made noticeable gains, in spite of many gaps in achievements, by taking a substantial segment of our people from below the poverty line to a better living. Our planned efforts of the last five decades have helped us, to some extent, in mitigating the extent of privations of the colonial era and in building India into a nation of considerable economic strength within the framework of democracy, federalism and a policy of self-reliance.

Friends, I have not presented this positive picture overlooking the other India that lives under conditions of poverty, deprivation, squalour, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices. The social revolution our Founding Fathers had conceived does not seem to have touched the lives of a substantial section of our society. It is only when we succeed in making a positive impact upon the lives of those sections that still remain largely untouched by the lofty objectives of democratic governance that we can say that the system of governance we adopted nearly six decades back has become relevant for all our people.

Democracy is not all about periodic elections and political rights. It is fundamentally about providing for the basic needs of the people. "Health for all, education for all, home for all, jobs for all and security for all", should be the end results of democracy, which can be achieved only when the power structure is adequately representative of all sections of the society. Democracy is also about good-governance. Only when the Government is transparent, accountable, responsive and responsible can we claim to be moving in the direction of good governance.

In fact, democracy is perceived as a system of sound governance capable of ensuring effective, honest, equitable, accessible, accountable and transparent exercise of power by those who run the Government. Nobel Laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen, very perceptively analysed that democracy's claim to be valuable 'does not rest on just one particular merit'. He has stressed: "There is a plurality of virtues here, including, first, the *intrinsic* importance of political participation and freedom in human life; second, the *instrumental* importance of political incentives in keeping Governments responsible and accountable; and third, the *constructive* role of democracy in the formation of values and in the understanding of needs, rights and duties".

The greatest challenge before our democracy today is about how we make it work for the betterment of the common man. This would involve the creation of enabling social, political, economic and legal conditions that would help every section of the society to participate fully in the process of governance and empowering them to ask questions to hold the State accountable always.

The dream of our Founding Fathers was to evolve a structure which would be most suited and relevant for the achievement of socio-economic and political justice for the common man, the eradication of poverty and ending the exploitation of the disadvantaged sections of society and providing for the basic needs of the people by ensuring universal education, an effective health care system and job opportunities for all. One of the guiding principles in this regard was Mahatma Gandhi's notion of democracy which was one where the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar put it in perspective when he stressed that we must not content ourselves with mere political democracy; we should rather strive to make our political democracy a social democracy as well. As he rightly observed, the formal framework of democracy is of no value and would indeed be a misfit if there was no social democracy. He went on to emphasise that democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness resulting in the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged. He was convinced that without social union and cohesion, political unity is difficult to be achieved and asserted, in his inimitable style, that if at all it is achieved, it would be as precarious as a summer sapling, liable to be uprooted by the gust of wind. With a framework of political democracy already in place, we should embark upon the task of bringing economic and social democracy to the centre-stage of all our developmental programmes so that the fruits of development are enjoyed by one and all equally and human dignity remains inviolable under all circumstances.

Millions of our people have still not been emancipated from the vicious cycle of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, poor health care, gender-based prejudices and other economic and social infirmities and specially so in the case of the disadvantaged and the marginalised sections. The conditions of the working class are no better. Food, shelter and clothing for a majority of our people continue to remain a distant goal.

The most crucial factor, therefore, to my mind, is to make decision-making a more inclusive process in which the common man has a say in shaping his life and every one is given an equal chance to share in the resultant economic and social gains. We have to necessarily make democratic values and culture an objective reality for every segment of society if a deeper process of political development is to be achieved. That is why promoting democratic politics will not be possible without expanding capabilities such as education, improved health, knowledge and skill to enable people to play a more effective role in decision-making.

For this, it is important to identify the sections that have so far been discriminated against and kept out of the purview of development. Women have to be made equal partners with men in private and public spheres of life and decision-making. People have to be freed from discriminations based on race, ethnicity, class or gender. To achieve all these, our economic and social policies have to be responsive to people's needs and aspirations. We need to have a strong national urge to eradicate poverty and achieve an acceptable level of equity in society, besides broadening people's choices on all fronts. All these are key parameters, which need to be addressed to achieve human development goals so as to make democracy relevant for the common man.

The democracy that we are talking about and all its achievements so far have no relevance to the more than 400 million of our citizens who still live unsure of their next square meal. The growing gap between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have-nots does not make our democracy stronger; it only undermines our socio-economic and political systems. As Swami Vivekananda said: " A few thousand graduates do not make a nation, a few rich men do not make a nation." We cannot hold distributive justice as a distant dream any more. Prof. Amartya Sen has rightly observed: "...the protective role of democracy may be particularly important for the poor. This obviously applies to potential famine victims who face starvation. It also applies to the destitute thrown off the economic ladder in a financial crisis. People in economic need also need a political voice. Democracy is not a luxury that can await the arrival of general prosperity."

There has to be a firm commitment on the part of all of us to achieve the goals laid down in the Constitution to mete out justice equally to all. If the basic issues affecting the every day life of the common man have to be effectively addressed, the Directive Principles, which have been appropriately described as *the Manifesto of a Welfare State* should be made enforceable to ensure accountability of the administration. Article 38 of the Constitution, which forms the core of those Directives, had made it incumbent upon the State to constantly "strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life." This would involve, as Gandhiji said: " ... a leveling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth, on the one hand, and the leveling up of the semi starved, naked millions on the other."

Another important aspect of making democracy relevant to the common man, to my mind, is the effectiveness of our justice delivery system. As you know, an independent Judiciary has been accorded an important role in our constitutional set-up to protect the rights and interest of the citizens. No doubt, our Judiciary has played its role towards preserving, protecting and promoting Fundamental Rights of the citizens, in many cases checking administrative lapses and curbing Executive excesses and in strengthening the democratic culture of the country, yet the mounting arrears of cases and slow moving judicial process make the scenario quite distressing as this, in many instances, almost amounts to denial of justice itself to the common man.

Often the Judiciary is applauded for what is described as 'Judicial activism'. Like learned Justice Krishna Iyer, I too had the benefit of combining an active public life with an equally active association with the Bar. I believe that activism of any institution has to be first and foremost in discharging its

basic and fundamental duty. The Judiciary, therefore, has to guard against, the tendency to go overboard on issues that are more effectively discharged by other organs and are also specifically assigned to them by the Constitution. If the so called activism of one wing of the State results in making any other wing defunct, irrelevant or suspect before the public, not only will it be doing a great disservice to the people, but will also be undermining the well-thought out scheme of separation of powers provided by the Constitution.

Such assumption of jurisdiction has inhibited many well-meaning executive authorities from discharging their functions according to their judgment and obligation. Ideally the responsibility for managing public affairs should be well left to those on whom the Constitution has imposed obligation and for which, in the ultimate analysis, they are accountable to the people. Discharge of executive responsibilities by any other authority, howsoever highly placed, but non-accountable, is nothing but arrogation of the authority to govern – a task clearly assigned to the Executive. There should be no assumption that any particular organ has a monopoly of concern for the people.

Rule of law has to be enforced not by expanding any organ's extent of powers, by encroaching into the areas specifically assigned to any other, but by diligently and effectively discharging each one's assigned responsibilities. In my view, therefore, the Judiciary, one of the three main pillars of our democratic governance, to make itself relevant for the common people, has to demonstrate a greater degree of activism in discharging its primary responsibility of providing speedy and cheap justice and operate in a manner clearly recognizing the space provided to the other institutions of democratic governance.

On another plane, there is a general perception that the public administration system, which is also an important component of our governance structure, has not been able to deliver the goods to the extent that is expected of it. Red tapism and corrupt practices have been a bane of our public administration. Lord Curzon's poetic description of the pace of movement of the files, " round and round like the diurnal revolution of the earth went the file – stately, solemn, sure and slow", still holds good, though a century has passed by us since he made those observations. We have to drive in a new sense of urgency into our bureaucracy at all levels about issues of development. A competent, educated and dedicated bureaucracy, well-trained in the art and science of administration and functioning transparently, and with probity is a necessary prerequisite for a people-oriented democracy.

I consider transparency in the public administration and its accountability to the people as important factors in ensuring that democracy delivers good

in its concern for the common man. It has a two-fold advantage – transparency and accountability tone down the chances of corruption in the system and secondly they strengthen democratic institutions by creating awareness, involvement and participation of an informed citizenry. Democratic societies are expected to be open and transparent. We had recognized long back that the right to information was implicit in the right to freedom of speech as enshrined in the Fundamental Rights in our Constitution. We have procedural devices provided in our Parliament and the State Legislatures to strengthen Executive accountability but that is not enough to ensure the transparency required of the administration and to satisfy the people's right to know. The right to information, now statutorily recognized, should become a tool of grass-roots empowerment, which would also work against corruption and exploitation. As it is said, it is in secret places that corruption thrives.

It is with this realization that we have decided to telecast live the entire proceedings of our Parliament. The people have a right to know what transpires in Parliament and how their representatives articulate their concerns and grievances before the highest popular forum of our democracy. It has also been our endeavour to ensure that the institutions of democracy always remained accountable to the highest people's forum. With this objective in mind the functioning of Parliamentary Committees *vis-a-vis* the Executive is being made more effective. As you may be aware, a Parliamentary Committee, in its functioning, is treated like a mini-Parliament itself. Once their functioning is streamlined and their suggestions and recommendations find adequate reflection in the policy formulation, we will be adding an important dimension to the concept of representative democracy in the country.

I must add here that our Parliament itself has to be ever vigilant about the growing cynicism among our people about the way the institutions of our democracy function. It is on Parliament, more than on any other organ, that the responsibility for sustaining people's faith in democracy as the most sensitive system to the people's problems, rests. Therefore, the institution collectively and the individual members, who constitute it, will have to function as role models for the society at large. As the Presiding Officer of the House of the People, I am acutely aware of this great responsibility.

The civil society and the media would also do well to see how best the new initiatives are effectively made use of as instruments of socio-economic change for the benefit of the common man. Where the State takes it as a duty to safeguard the freedom of media, it expects of the media to bolster democracy through its varied roles in a responsible and responsive manner and contribute in partnership to secure political, economic and social development in ways consistent with democratic principles.

Once we recognise the common man as an equal stakeholder in the policies and programmes of the country, as a means of capacity building, we must accept that education adequate in quantity and quality with contemporary relevance, is the most powerful instrument for empowering people and for facilitating development. In fact, education is the best tool for empowerment and the key to human development. It is basic to our progress and to the achievement of important goals like democracy, secularism, equity, liberty, fraternity, justice and national integration. To quote Swami Vivekananda again: "the only service to be done to our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality... . They are to be given ideas, their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them; and then they will work out their own salvation ... ."

Populist platitudes will not help in addressing the common man's problems. The Eighty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution provides for free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of six to fourteen years. Such initiatives can impact upon the lives of the people only when the injunctions emanating from them are matched by the conviction among the leaders of society of the need for such measures. Otherwise they will only remain paper provisions for the people. A successful education policy would form not only the bedrock of national development in all its dimensions but would also form the foundation for a vibrant democracy, growth of productivity, income and employment opportunities, thus offering quality life to the common man. This is important for bringing about a stable social order also. Prof. Amartya Sen rightly said: "if we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure... Not to be able to read or write or count or communicate is a tremendous deprivation... ." Unquote.

For our priorities to be actualized, we have to carry the people with us and make them active partners in our planning and developmental processes. We have taken some measures in the right direction by enacting the Constitution 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts to facilitate decentralised governance and participatory planning. Participatory planning increases transparency, besides facilitating better integration of the developmental process and making the programmes more responsive to the local needs by addressing the problems of the common man. I acknowledge, Kerala has made rapid strides in this. Its participatory planning programmes have contributed significantly in enabling increased transparency, with commendable achievements in the key areas of human development. Even at the existing level of economic growth, we can improve the conditions of the common man by generating political awareness and by utilizing available resources by collective action in a more transparent way.

We still have a lot to do to enable greater participation and involvement of women in our representative bodies. No system of Government or polity can afford to sustain itself by ignoring this vital productive human resource which makes for almost half of the world population. This process of democratization by including women in its fold is sure to make the common man feel the change for a better and secure future for generations to come.

Friends, the thrust of our democracy and development has to be, therefore, among other things, on empowering people in the fullest sense. We have to expand the capabilities of the common man to realise his full potential by extending improved health, value-based modern scientific education and increased employment opportunities. I am sure, with the rising levels of education, employment and income, the common man will be able to secure a better future for himself. This will strengthen his belief in the efficacy of the democratic set-up and he will not take long to understand that democracy is the only political regime which, when fine-tuned with sound governance practices, is capable of ensuring political and civil freedoms, besides promoting more equitable outcomes for the people. The effectiveness of a Government in a developing society like ours is not to be judged on the basis of its popularity with the rich but with the poor who needs it the most. Those in governance should not gloss over the sadness in the eyes of the poor when they see the broadening smile on the faces of the rich.

If the man on the street is left at the mercy of forces of exploitation and orthodoxy, if he cannot freely exercise his constitutionally guaranteed rights, if he does not feel part of the political and developmental processes, if he cannot take informed decisions on the issues that affect his worth as a citizen, if he cannot partake of the fruits of development, if he cannot live in dignity and if his social, economic and political future is decided by his standing in an obscurantist, hierarchical social structure, then, democracy has no meaning to him, it does not hold any relevance for him. Such paradoxes of democracy that he encounters daily, will shake his confidence in the system as a whole. That cynicism, that skepticism, could yet be the gravest threat to democracy as a system of governance. We cannot afford to take even minor threats to democracy lightly. As the distinguished British Journalist, Bernard Levin, cautioned, "... remember that every nation that has fallen from democracy into tyranny was at one time only remotely in danger, and we would do well to think of ways that can strengthen our defences." The most important thing to do, to my mind, is to make it relevant for the weakest of our citizens.

There should be only one class of people in a just democracy and that is the enlightened citizenry, whose happiness, dignity and self-respect are expected to be guided by laws and institutions in the making and unmaking of which they have a decisive say. As the eminent Justice Frankfurter said,

"the highest office in a democracy is not that of the President, but that of being a citizen." This is about the essence of democracy. We should not forget that the most fundamental *raison d'etre* for a democracy is an authentically just social order, as against a 'counterfeit' one, if I may borrow an expression from Justice Krishna Iyer himself. Only so long as the interest of the common man remains at the center of democratic discourse will democracy continue to be relevant for him. It was such a democracy that statesmen and visionaries like V.K. Krishna Menon visualized and strove all through their life to accomplish.

The *Mainstream* magazine paid rich tributes to V.K. Krishna Menon: "Thoughts remarkably clear and astoundingly brilliant flew from his mind like sparks from an anvil. He had stupendous grasp of the historical forces at work in India and the world as a whole. The historic contributions he made to the national movement for freedom,... assertion of the voice of the newly liberated nations on the international stage, the strengthening of the forces that stood for world peace,... the advancement of national liberation and the end of colonialism and racism, the imparting of a socialist direction to India's plans and policies,... *etc.* became possible because of the unique qualities of his mind and total dedication to and self-effacement in the cause of the advancement of India and mankind as a whole."

Krishna Menon, with his great intellectual power and passionate dedication to the country's causes, was indeed a crusader for the building of a new India, in which the common man received his dues, and for a just and equitable world order. It is said that in the early years of a Republic, it is the leaders who create institutions, but later it is expected of these institutions to be capable of producing leaders. Only when our democracy acquires the resilience to churn out leaders of great calibre, from among the common people, in all walks of life, can we say with confidence that it has become really relevant for the real commoners of our country. This can be achieved when leaders, who place the country before them and use the institutions of democracy to safeguard the interests of the country and its people, lead the country.

Thank you for your patient hearing.

ENHANCING EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMITTEE ON SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION*

It gives me great pleasure to be with you all at the inaugural function of the Conference of the Chairmen of Committees on Subordinate Legislation of the Parliament and the State Legislatures. I am particularly pleased to be associated with this Conference, having myself been Chairman of the Committee on Subordinate Legislation of the Lok Sabha during 1977-79 and again during 1991-93.

I understand that this is the fifth Conference of its kind, the four earlier ones having been held in 1960, 1975, 1981 and 1986. Coming after a gap of nearly two decades, this Conference is indeed important. These Conferences not only provide a useful forum for exchange of ideas and experiences among the learned Chairmen but also go a long way in addressing various problems faced by the Committees in their scrutiny of subordinate legislation. I am sure that your interactions here will greatly help the Committees on Subordinate Legislation in performing their duties in a more effective and focused manner.

Friends, as the range and complexity of governmental activities in the modern world are rapidly expanding, legislation has ceased to be a simple affair as was the case in the past. As you all know, Parliament also is no more a body for enacting legislation but a multi-functional institution encompassing in its fold a wide array of activities impinging on nation building. That being so, it is simply not possible, not even feasible, for Parliament or a State Legislature, to deliberate upon, discuss and approve every detail of legislation in a meaningful and purposive way.

It has been observed in various countries that only a small part of the total legislative output comes directly from the Legislature. The Legislature formulates only the general principles or policies relating to the subject-matter in question and confers the rule-making powers on the Government Departments or other administrative agencies. The Legislature can only lay down the broad policy and principles of a piece of legislation leaving the details to be worked out by the Executive. The need to meet unforeseen

* At the inauguration of the Conference of the Chairmen of the Committees on Subordinate Legislation of Parliament and State Legislatures, New Delhi (4 October 2005).

contingencies as also the intricacies of the subject-matter makes delegation of rule-making a necessity. Yet, it is widely held that delegation is permissible only when the legislative policy and principle is properly laid down and the delegated agency is only empowered to carry out the subsidiary policy within the guidelines laid down by the Legislature itself. Needless to say, in this process, the supreme status of the Parliament cannot be lost sight of.

The crucial questions in this regard are: how much power should be delegated to the subordinate authorities and what restraints or safeguards should be imposed on such authorities? Though there is general consensus that subordinate legislation is vitally important, it is admitted that such a system has certain risks inherent in it. One such risk is that legislative enactments may contain only the barest general principles and leave wide discretion to the concerned Department or authority not only to work out matters of detail but also to regulate subjects of substantive nature. They may impose an unreasonable burden on the citizens by requiring them to comply with conditions and formalities which might be restrictive of individual rights and freedoms. It is possible that the Executive may include in the rules matters which were never originally intended to be included therein by the Legislature such tendencies tend to result in various difficulties and complexities.

An important safeguard against the assumption of arbitrary powers by the Executive is the requirement that the rules framed by it in exercise of the delegated powers should not only be laid before the Legislature, but that the Legislature should also have the authority of annulling or modifying them if they are found to contain any unreasonable provisions or if they exceed the limits of delegation. As such, it has to be ensured that the rules, regulations, etc. framed under delegated authority are laid before the Parliament within the timeframe specified for the purpose.

It is here that the Committee on Subordinate Legislation plays an important role by keeping a watchful eye on the delegation of rule-making powers and the way they are actually put to use by the subordinate authorities. The members of the Committee who represent the masses have a better understanding of their problems and hardships. It is because of this that they can ensure that the intentions of the Legislature and the interests of the people are protected. They have to safeguard the public interest and check any possible abuse of authority or any encroachment on parliamentary sovereignty. As a matter of fact, in the very first report presented to the Lok Sabha on 17 March 1954, the Committee on Subordinate Legislation insisted that bills containing proposals for delegation of legislative powers should be accompanied by a Memorandum stating clearly the authority which was being empowered to make subordinate legislation, the points which might be covered by the rules and the manner in which the powers should be exercised.

Successive Committees on Subordinate Legislation of Lok Sabha have made recommendations, especially in addressing specific concerns. I recall that when I was the Chairman, the Committee had time and again reiterated its strong reservation on issues like inordinate delay in the publication of rules, inadequate publicity of rules and regulations, retrospective effect given to rules without due legal authority and express authorization, sub-delegation of legislative powers and authority, ambiguous and vague provisions which lacked clarity and precision of expression, delay in the implementation of Committee reports, delay in submitting Action Taken Reports, etc.

I would like to stress that the Committee should, however, not adopt an adversarial attitude towards the Executive. As a matter of fact, it should help the Executive in the proper discharge of its duties for the progress and prosperity of the masses. They should work in tandem for the welfare of the people.

Friends, today, we see an increasing decentralization of power and authority. More and more powers are being delegated to statutory bodies and agencies. Regulatory Authorities dealing with vital governmental functions are coming up. The Legislatures, in such a scenario, will have to delegate powers of rule making in a substantial way. In this changed context, the Committees on Subordinate Legislation will have a very important role to play. As I said earlier, successive Committees on Subordinate Legislation have made pioneering recommendations with regard to rule and regulation making. With Parliament having enacted the Right to Information Act, we have sanctified our people's right to know of the actions and activities of all governmental agencies and bodies in greater detail. Constitutional conformity and parliamentary mandate should ever be borne in mind while drafting the rules. Moreover, the rules and regulations made by statutory bodies should be clear, precise and unambiguous so that the people can understand them easily. Obfuscation cannot be a virtue under any circumstances. In all these matters, the Committees on Subordinate Legislation can be a very effective watchdog.

I am indeed pleased to note that the Committee on Subordinate Legislation of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, under the Chairmanship of Shri N.N. Krishnadas, has made very important recommendations of far-reaching significance. In its First Report, the Committee has rightly stressed that the delegation should be made specific and that provisions of extreme nature should be provided in the Parent Act itself and should not form part of the rules. The Committee has emphasised that the Executive should avoid anachronistic amendments in rules and ensure that all inter-related information is in place at the time of amendment. The Committee has also asserted justifiably that the legislative powers delegated to the Executive ought to be exercised with care and caution

and should not be used to make up for their ignorance of the legislative provisions already in vogue or to arrogate to itself the powers of the Legislature. I heartily compliment the Committee on the good work it is doing. I would also like to felicitate the Committee on Subordinate Legislation of the Rajya Sabha which too is doing very productive work under the guidance of its Chairman, Shri A. Vijayaraghavan.

Friends, you have selected some very topical issues of crucial importance for discussion in your Conference. Matters like legislation by reference, time-limit for framing rules, competence of the Legislature to modify rules and regulations, examination of bills, etc. are of great relevance to the functioning of the Committees on Subordinate Legislation. The Committees in the two Houses of Parliament come across a wide array of issues which imparts to them a special experience in handling these issues. I am sure the Committees of our State Legislatures stand to benefit from this varied experience of their counterparts in Parliament while dealing with similar situations in their Legislatures. I am confident that this Conference will facilitate fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences. This, I trust, will go a long way in further enhancing the effectiveness of the Committees on Subordinate Legislation in our Legislative Bodies.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Conference.

Thank you.

IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS INTERPLAY WITH PARLIAMENT*

The concept of civil society, encompassing within itself the people as a whole, has gained wider currency globally with the triumph of democracy across the world in the recent decades. Along with the other pillars of democracy like the Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary and the free Press, the civil society has come to play an increasingly important role in the processes of governance and development.

The civil society is able to access, articulate and aggregate the common interests of the people. It can also play a role in promoting democratic discourse and good governance practices. Besides, the civil society can contribute towards making democracy more participatory, inclusive and broad-based, leading to a more informed citizenry and thus help in bridging the democracy gap and in reinforcing a democratic culture.

In a democratic set-up, there is a symbiotic relationship between the Parliament and the civil society. The civil society cannot function effectively without institutions at different levels to lend it a helping hand. The most significant among such institutions is the Parliament which represents the sovereign will of the people, as also the different interests, opinions and segments of the civil society. The civil society can be an effective interface between the people and the Parliament as also between the people and the administration.

There are several key areas including issues relating to the protection and promotion of human rights, education, health care, eradication of socio-economic iniquities, curbing corruption, etc. in which both the Parliament and the civil society can work together. Empowerment of the people, conservation of environment, sustainable development, combating drug abuse, fighting the AIDS epidemic, confronting the challenge of terrorism, etc. are crucial issues having a bearing on the democratic system. These are high-priority areas in which the Government needs the support of the entire citizenry. The inputs provided by the groups and organizations within the

* At the 113th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on *The Importance of Civil Society and its Interplay with Parliament and other Democratically-Elected Assemblies for the Maturing and Development of Democracy*, Geneva (17 October 2005).

civil society will go a long way in helping both the Parliament and the Executive in formulating appropriate legislations and policies and programmes to successfully overcome these challenges which, in turn, will strengthen the foundations of democracy.

In our country, we are ceaselessly striving to associate the civil society meaningfully in all our endeavours to address the concerns and considerations of our people. Our parliamentarians make use of various procedural devices and the forum of Parliamentary Committees to articulate the grievances of our people and seek their redressal. Our endeavour has always been to build a viable and proactive partnership with the civil society. We seek to work not as competing centres of power but as partners in strengthening the national cause. Our common goal is the welfare of the people in all its dimensions which, I believe, is best achieved in a vigilant and vibrant democracy.

We believe that it is important for the Parliaments and the civil society to work together to realize the objective of establishing an equitable world order, recognizing the rights of the people everywhere for a dignified existence and the sovereignty of individual countries, in a world order governed by the principles of democracy.

Thank you.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS BY SHARING TRADITIONS AND PRACTICES*

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to be here with you at the 70th Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India. I wish to express my deep appreciation for the very heart-warming, instructive and inspiring Welcome Address delivered by the Hon'ble Speaker of Chhattisgarh and I thank him for the warm hospitality. This is the first time that the Legislative Assembly of Chhattisgarh is hosting this Conference after the State was formed. I wish to thank the Hon'ble Speaker of the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly for graciously volunteering to host the Conference at Raipur and for providing excellent hospitality, which is quite in keeping with the rich cultural heritage of Chhattisgarh, which has produced great leaders who have made profound contribution to our freedom struggle in different spheres—spiritual, socio-cultural, literary and intellectual—of our country. We are happy to be here at Raipur, the model of a resurgent State of our country.

Friends, we are meeting under the shadow of the passing away of one of the country's most distinguished sons, Shri K.R. Narayanan, our former Rashtrapatiji. In his demise, the country has lost one of its greatest leaders who adorned, with distinction, several offices including that of the President of our Republic and shed lustre on all of them. His life provides a saga of continuous struggle against injustice and inequities of all kinds. From his very humble beginnings in a remote village in Kerala, with his great merit and commitment, he rose to occupy the highest office of the land. He dedicated his life to the service of the masses and identified himself with the deprived and the downtrodden. He always cherished the true message of our Constitution and upheld its values and ideals, thereby strengthening our democratic edifice. He had an outstanding tenure as the Presiding Officer of the Rajya Sabha. In Shri Narayanan's death, we have lost a sagacious statesman, an ardent champion of secularism and constitutional propriety, and a friend of the underprivileged. His passing away has indeed left a void that will be difficult to fill, but his life will ever remain an inspiration to all those who believe in building a secular, progressive, rational and egalitarian society.

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* At the inauguration of the 70th Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, Raipur, Chhattisgarh (15 November 2005).

It is also my sad duty to make a reference to the passing away of some of our esteemed former colleagues. They are Shri Ghulam Sarwar and Shri Radhanandan Jha, both former Speakers of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha; Shri Himmatlal T. Mulani, former Speaker of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly; Shri Prasanna Kumar Dash, former Speaker of the Orissa Legislative Assembly; and Thiru Munu Adhi, former Speaker of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. I pay my respectful homage to the memory of the deceased who had graced the fraternity of Presiding Officers.

Let me take this opportunity to once again felicitate Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, our distinguished colleague from West Bengal, who has been elected as the new Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for the next three years. I am sure all of you will join me in congratulating the longest-serving Presiding Officer in our country and a valued colleague on his assuming this prestigious Office and for the great honour bestowed on him and the country as a whole. It is undoubtedly a landmark event in our parliamentary history.

This is the third time we are meeting this year. After the Emergent Conference in New Delhi in March 2005 we had met in New Delhi in July 2005 at the 69th Conference. I believe regular interactions among the Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies are extremely helpful, as they enable us to exchange our experiences and to discuss many important issues relating to the functioning of our elected bodies and discharging our Constitutional functions. There have been some significant developments of parliamentary interest that have taken place since we last met in New Delhi in July 2005.

As all of you are well aware, the need to maintain harmonious relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary has been engaging our attention for quite sometime now. In fact, we discussed this crucial subject during our Emergent Conference in New Delhi earlier this year. A related matter came up before the Lok Sabha during the Monsoon Session when, on 24 August 2005, some Hon'ble members made submissions regarding the reported observations made by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, advising the Government to exercise self-restraint in criticizing the Supreme Court's observations on State quota and the reservation policy in unaided private professional colleges. I am sure you all are fully familiar with the facts. Associating myself with the sentiments of the members, I observed in the Lok Sabha:

> ... Legislature has its own rights and Parliament, as the supreme legislative body, surely will act according to its rights under the Constitution. Similarly, the courts have their own rights to function in their own sphere without any interference; and nobody can interfere. Now there is undoubted right of the court to construe the laws passed by this

Parliament. Therefore, many laws passed by the Parliament have been declared *ultra vires* and it is binding on everybody. Thus what is important is that there should be a harmonious relationship between the major Constitutional organizations like the Legislature and the Court, and nothing should be done or said which may create an avoidable controversy.

In the Monsoon Session of Lok Sabha, there was a serious incident when some papers were thrown at the Chair by a member supposedly in protest against the disallowance of a notice of an Adjournment Motion. It had been disallowed by the Chair on the ground that an identical matter had already been discussed at length in the House only a few days back and that, as per the rules, the same matter could not be raised again during the Session. Some comments appeared in a section of the media against the Chair for disallowing the Motion. Keeping the seriousness of the issue in mind, I gave my ruling in the House on 4 August 2005 when I stated, *inter alia*, as follows:

Hon'ble Members, my attention has been drawn to some reports in the print media and I have also seen some of the news-items in the electronic media on what has happened in the hon'ble House yesterday. Unfortunately, somewhat one-sided report has been given in some quarters raising questions about the impartiality of the Chair in dealing with the issue desired to be raised by one hon'ble member. As such, I wish to make the position clear.

It is necessary to recall only on 26 July 2005, one Adjournment Motion was admitted by me and there was a full and comprehensive discussion on the question of infiltration of foreigners into our country including infiltration from Bangladesh. The concerned hon'ble member did not choose to take part in the debate nor, so far as I have been informed, was even present in the House. The same matter cannot be raised twice in one Session of the House as clearly provided by the Rules. Just because one hon'ble Member was not present during the discussion in the House does not justify trying to raise the similar issue within a week or, at all, during that Session. Rules will have to prevail at all times and for all. If there was any doubt, the reason could have been ascertained from the Chair.

The Hon'ble Deputy-Speaker was in the Chair when the question was raised and he had, if I may say so, rightly informed the House of my decision as the Speaker. But nobody met me or tried to know the reasons of my refusal to admit the similar Motion. Whatever may have been the feeling, it could not and cannot ever justify in indulging in behaviour as happened yesterday. I wish to repudiate categorically and with all the authority of the Chair and with all sincerity the reprehensible insinuation that my decision was prompted by political considerations. Making such

allegations was a deliberate attempt to insult the Chair and thereby insulting the House as a whole.

However, I shall be failing in my duty if I do not record my total rejection of the grossly defamatory insinuation made against me about taking decisions on political grounds.

I again wish to appeal to all the hon'ble Members and all sides of the House that as this House belongs to all and ultimately to the people of this country, let us not do or say anything which will, in any way, compromise with the dignity of the House and belie the expectations of the people.

During the Monsoon Session, we had to deal with some very important privilege issues as well. In one such instance, seven members gave notices of question of privilege against the Editor and Publisher of the English daily, *The Pioneer*, for having published a derogatory news-report, which appeared on 7 August 2005. Hon'ble Members contended that the impugned article constituted a deliberate attack on the Office of the Speaker of Lok Sabha as well as of the House and its members. Sharing the concern of the members, I gave a detailed ruling in the matter before treating it as closed. Since this ruling has a bearing upon the Legislature-Media relationship, which, incidentally, is also one of the topics of discussion at the Conference, I would like to share with you some of the observations which I put forth on that occasion. In my opinion, the impugned article not only reeked of malice but was also highly contumacious in its conception and in its contents and amounted to gross breach of privilege of the Speaker and also of the House. I observed in the House *inter alia*, as under:

> Freedom of Press, a cherished Fundamental Right in our country, is subject to reasonable restrictions, as contemplated by the Constitution itself, and cannot and does not comprise deliberately tendentious and motivated attacks on the great institutions of this Republic and their officers and functionaries... . In the name of exercising freedom of Press, there cannot be trial by the Press in which it plays the role of both the accuser and the judge.
>
> Freedom of Press also encompasses fundamental duties of the Press, which call for showing respect for others and responsible behaviour and cannot permit denigration of the constitutional bodies and the institutions and their important segments.
>
> It should be noted that although the Presiding Officer of this House is publicly accused of improper behaviour and of partisanship, he cannot join in any public controversy. A most disquieting development is that when the matter has been raised in the House and the Speaker has reserved his ruling, there are open discussions in the electronic

> media as also in the same newspaper where the concerned correspondent and his Editor have tried to justify the allegations, and thereby, in my opinion, aggravating the breach of privilege. Significantly, the Speaker can only be a viewer of the so-called discussion and not a participant. The Speaker has to depend on the commitment of the hon'ble Members of this House, who are keen to preserve the dignity and the status of this great institution. Precisely, for this reason, I had expressed my thanks to those hon'ble Members, who raised the matter on 12th August 2005 on the floor of this House because only by such reference, the exposure of the contumacious acts could be made. I have no manner of doubt that if such serious accusations of partisanship and libellous allegations had been made against the Judiciary, it would have been a glaring example of contempt of court....
>
> ...The Press is rightly described as the Fourth Estate, because without a free and responsible Press, alive to its duties and believing in truth and honesty, this democratic system would almost collapse.

However, in view of the condemnation on the floor of the House, and as it would be beneath the dignity of the great institution of Parliament to take further notice of the motivated imputations in the impugned article, I did not give my consent as requested and I treated the matter as closed, of course, with the observation that, in future, reckless and contumacious conduct indulged in by whosoever would be dealt with in the appropriate manner so as to preserve and enhance the dignity of the highest public forum in our country.

We have mentioned these matters because it created a lot of controversy and I feel that it is essential for us and everybody to maintain cordial relationship between different organs as also between the Legislature and the Media.

When we met in New Delhi in July this year, I had informed you about an initiative to constitute a Parliamentary Forum on Water, to enable the members to discuss the related problems in a structured manner with a result-oriented approach. I am indeed pleased to inform you that I have since constituted the Parliamentary Forum on Water Conservation and Management in consultation with the Hon'ble Chairman of Rajya Sabha with effect from 12 August 2005. This Forum, with the Speaker, Lok Sabha, as the *ex officio* President and the Ministers of Water Resources, Urban Development, Rural Development, Agriculture and Science & Technology, the Deputy Speaker, Lok Sabha and the Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, as the *ex officio* Vice-Presidents, consists of 21 members from the Lok Sabha and 10 from the Rajya Sabha. The Forum, *inter alia*, aims to identify problems relating to water and make suggestions/recommendations for consideration and

appropriate action by the Government/Organisations concerned; identify the ways of involving Members of Parliament in conservation and augmentation of water resources in their respective States/Constituencies; and organize seminars/workshops to create awareness for conservation and efficient management of water. I have made it very clear that this Forum, in no way, will impinge upon the functioning of the Ministries or the Committees concerned. A preliminary meeting of the Forum was held on 8 August 2005 to discuss the broad guidelines regarding its functioning and ways and means to strengthen and further streamline it.

In this regard, we have also taken another initiative to facilitate exchange of views on issues of topical concern between the members of Parliament and subject experts in diverse fields through a Lecture Series. I feel that such interactions will not only enlighten the parliamentarians about various contemporary problems substantially impacting on the socio-economic fabric of our country, but will also help them in playing a proactive role in tackling these issues meaningfully. We have already had two such lectures, respectively on 'Water Conservation' and on the 'Value Added Tax System' in the country.

As you are all well aware, two separate dedicated Satellite Channels were launched on 14 December 2004, for the live telecast of the entire proceedings of the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha nationwide. Regarding the future of these channels, I am pleased to inform you that the Lok Sabha Television Channel is going to be a 24-hour, round-the-year channel shortly, which will be run by the Lok Sabha Secretariat. In this regard, necessary arrangements are being made, both at the policy and the operational levels. This channel is expected to be fully operational by the Budget Session of 2006. We have been assured of full cooperation by the Rajya Sabha, and I am thankful to the Deputy Chairman for that assurance.

At our New Delhi Conference of July 2005, I had informed you that pursuant to the recommendations of the Committee of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies on Telecasting of the Proceedings of Legislatures, we had approached the Planning Commission and the Union Ministry of Finance requesting them to meet the expenditure required for setting up infrastructure facilities for the live telecast of the proceedings of our Legislatures. According to the Planning Commission, a feasible formula should be devised for sharing fixed costs with a clear statement of recurring expenditure involved and initial funds required to start the scheme. A Feasibility Report is to be submitted by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Accordingly, we have approached the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to consider a proposal for including in the Plan Scheme of the Ministry for providing funds for telecasting the proceedings of our State Legislatures.

Coming to the subjects at the Conference, we are going to discuss two important themes which have a very crucial bearing on our parliamentary democratic system. Undoubtedly, the subjects, *viz.* 'Poverty Alleviation—How the Parliament and Civil Society can work in tandem' and the 'Legislature and the Media—Roles and Responsibilities', I must stress, are indeed extremely relevant in the present-day context.

As you all well know, the eradication of poverty continues to be one of the stupendous challenges before our country. In the enormous task of the elimination of poverty, governmental efforts alone will not be sufficient. It is here that the civil society can play a significant role.

Of course, the legislators are a key component in any programme aimed at the elimination of poverty. By their grass root experience, they can provide valuable inputs to the Government in addressing the challenge of poverty. They can also be of immense help in monitoring the implementation of various policies and programmes for the elimination of poverty. The legislators should endeavour ceaselessly to find creative ways in which they could work together with the civil society more effectively in this regard. The legislators and the civil society organisations can work in close understanding between them to mobilize and organize the poor to become active participants in the process of development and delivery services.

Through various procedural devices, discussions on policies and programmes and through the forum of Parliamentary Committees, our Parliament has been addressing the problem of poverty in the country. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that recently our Parliament has the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2005 which provides for the enhancement of livelihood security for the poor households in the rural areas by giving at least hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to each household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. I am sure that this landmark legislation is indeed a step in the right direction in mitigating poverty. Governmental and legislative efforts need to be effectively supported and supplemented by the civil society groups by working in tandem so that we can eliminate poverty which, undoubtedly, is a threat to societal stability and democracy as well.

The second subject which we are going to discuss at the Conference, is 'Legislature and the Media—Roles and Responsibilities'. Five decades after Independence, the challenges before our nation are indeed of grave nature. The eradication of poverty, socio-economic injustice and regional disparities continue to be major problems we are still grappling with. As pivotal pillars of our political system, the Legislature and the Media can contribute meaningfully to the process of the socio-economic transformation of our country. While the Legislature debates issues of governance and development

and passes laws for the socio-economic betterment of the people, the media articulates people's urges, aspirations and concerns. It is in the Chambers of the Legislatures that the Government is held accountable for all its acts of commission and omission. In such a scenario, it becomes incumbent upon the media to give a positive coverage of what is happening in our legislative bodies.

Freedom of the Press is inherent in the Fundamental Right to freedom of speech guaranteed under article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. The Parliament itself has enacted the Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Act, 1977, providing the privilege of publishing substantially true proceedings in Parliament without being exposed to any civil or criminal action. Our Parliament has also been striving to provide adequate facilities to the media to cover Parliament with the express purpose of bringing the supreme legislative institution nearer to the people.

The media can play a positive role by respecting parliamentary privileges as also by not trivializing the substantial work being done in the legislative bodies. The Legislatures and the media should be proactive partners in national development. As such, our legislative bodies and the media should complement and supplement each other in facilitating an informed democracy.

Hon'ble Presiding Officers, I have been repeatedly stressing the point that the success, effectiveness and relevance of any democratic institution lies in its smooth functioning and the extent to which it adheres to the highest standards of discipline, dignity and decorum for discharging its functions. While engaged in this endeavour, as Presiding Officers, we should also seek to provide ample opportunities to the members to raise issues of importance on the floor of the Legislatures, of course, within the rules, which we ourselves have framed for the purpose. In this regard, we have to constantly strive to nurture and nourish healthy traditions and sound conventions which have evolved over the decades. As the custodians of the rights and privileges of the legislators and of our legislative bodies as a whole, we have an onerous task before us. Conferences like these where we discuss common problems and share our experiences provide us with opportunities to fine-tune and further streamline the functioning of our legislative bodies, thus strengthening the parliamentary democratic structures we have built up so assiduously. I trust that this Seventieth Conference will be a major milestone in our march forward.

Before I conclude, I would like to place on record our deep appreciation and hearty thanks to our hosts, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, the Hon'ble Speaker and the Hon'ble Deputy Speaker of Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly, the Secretary of the Assembly and his colleagues, the

Government of Chhattisgarh and all those associated with the organization of this Conference here for the excellent arrangements and, of course, for their remarkable hospitality.

With these words, I am immensely pleased to inaugurate the 70th Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India.

Thank you very much.

ROLE OF MEMBER AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN THE CITIZENS AND THE GOVERNMENT*

I am happy to be here this morning at the Symposium being held on an important subject, namely, 'Role of Member as an Intermediary between Citizens and the Government'. The theme of the Symposium presents us with an ideal opportunity to explore the dynamics of the diverse roles of the members of our Legislative Bodies and make an objective assessment of the contribution they can make towards the overall socio-economic and political development of our nation.

In a parliamentary democracy, the Legislatures articulate the will of the people. Naturally, the legislators, as the people's representatives act as the closest intermediaries between the people and the Legislature on the one hand and between the people and the Government on the other, which provides a complex mix of challenges and opportunities. To effectively serve as the representatives of the people, members have to decide how they can meet the multifarious demands of individuals and those of the constituency as a whole; and what strategies they should devise to use the existing legislative mechanisms and devices to raise issues inside the House for solutions. The crucial task before them is to reconcile their constituency-specific commitments with the wider goals before the country.

In this context, we must bear in mind the broadening gamut of Executive actions, the changing size and composition of the electorate and their behaviour, and the defining role of technology. In our country, the range and complexity of legislations and policy commitments arising out of our distinct socio-economic problems have brought forth a fundamental change in our political environment and our members function under testing conditions. There are bound to be differences on various issues of local, regional and national importance. As such, a legislator has to keep the same in mind in making optimum use of the available opportunities and participate effectively in the legislative, financial and other business before the House and he has to reconcile to differing perceptions and opinions. A healthy member-constituents' relationship and its right projection in legislative proceedings

* At the Symposium on the *Role of Member as an Intermediary between the Citizens and the Government* during the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, Raipur, Chhattisgarh (17 November 2005).

strengthens the edifice of democracy. A member is in an ideal position to use his grassroots knowledge and understanding to mould the contents of public policy, and contribute to the legislative process by overseeing the performance of the Government. In this context, our Legislative Bodies have evolved a number of procedural devices, which a member may put to the best use to raise people's demands in the House and ensure that these are accommodated in public policy.

We are all conscious of the fact that the time of the House is most precious and it should be utilized meaningfully and optimally. The procedural trends have a bearing on our efforts to discuss people's issues in the House and impose a collective responsibility upon us to accord due regard to various practices and procedures which have been developed over the years for the effective and smooth functioning of the House.

Development poses the primary challenge to the legislators. The pre-eminence of economic activity in the development of various sectors of society makes it imperative to strengthen the link between the citizens and their representatives. Members are closely associated with economic processes because it is on the floor of the House that the policies and programmes of the Government are given shape. As such, it is necessary that members keep themselves posted about the objectives behind various initiatives of the Executive, influence legislative proposals containing developmental measures and contribute effectively to the subsequent implementation process as well. It is also necessary that the people are engaged in a continuous dialogue to facilitate inputs from them into the developmental programmes and projects.

We have evolved a series of procedural mechanisms for members to further strengthen their bond with their electorate, like the elaborate system of Committees, more notably the Financial Committees and the Departmentally related Standing Committees. As you know, in view of the paucity of time, it may not be possible for the Presiding Officers to accommodate the large number of eager participants in the proceedings of the House. In such a situation, the various Committees offer scope to the serious members to contribute to the discussions on the developmental process and socio-economic transformation of the society. As an instrument of ensuring transparency and accountability in administration, these Committees facilitate a close scrutiny of various policies and programmes, and thereby promoting the interests of the people at large. Of course, the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme has been envisaged as an effective mechanism to enable members to address developmental needs at the micro level in their constituencies, but the Scheme requires to be looked into in all its aspects, as several deficiencies have been pointed out recently.

The Parliamentary Committees invite memoranda from the citizens and the civil society with regard to issues being examined by them. The Committees are also offering opportunities to the concerned citizens to appear before them and put forth their suggestions. Such procedural innovations provide opportunities for an interface between the legislators and the citizens on the one hand and the legislators and the Government on the other.

Friends, good governance pre-supposes just and dignified living conditions for all citizens. It also warrants that administrative authority is exercised for the overall socio-economic and political development of the people as a whole. In such a scenario, the legislators can help to create a healthy environment, facilitate broad consensus on complex issues, and lead from the front for the socio-economic emancipation of the people. In fact, the success and future of our democratic system will depend on how effectively we anticipate the social needs of various segments of our population, mould the existing social structures and reawaken social consciousness of our people. It is, actually, on the floor of the House that the primary processes for legislation ensuring social change are set in motion.

A legislator is also an educator, who can effectively raise the level of political consciousness of the people. By virtue of his special position as the community leader, he can help in moulding public opinion, mobilizing people to support or oppose a particular idea or initiative, and in sensitizing them about various governmental programmes and policies. The role of members in conflict resolution in the society can hardly be overemphasized. Resource constraints and regional disparities in terms of economic development are some crucial aspects which we all have to confront as elected representatives. Our Legislative Bodies also act as channels of communication between the people and the Government where members play the pivotal role of both motivators and facilitators. It is through this interaction that the Government comes to know about diverse and differing perceptions on its policies and programmes, more notably on those which directly impinge on developmental concerns.

The socio-economic transformation, which we are witnessing in our country today, has brought forth various opportunities and challenges, which have to be effectively utilized and managed by all concerned. Ours is a welfare State which is committed to the common and larger good of the people. It is natural, therefore, that a number of welfare schemes have been designed to transfer the benefits of socio-economic development to the people. In many cases, the benefits are cornered by intermediaries, depriving the people of the fruits of development. A member's role in this process becomes very vital since he is the most accessible link that people have for airing their grievances.

In recent times, various developments like televising and web-casting of parliamentary proceedings, computerization of library and information management, video conferencing and other technological innovations have impacted on the role of members. Technology has, in fact, strengthened the position of the citizens as well, and they can now evaluate the performance of their representatives more closely and regularly, give their opinions on crucial issues, and if necessary, form pressure groups to air their concerns on issues affecting or likely to affect them.

The need for enabling the citizens to have access to information about public affairs on a statutory basis has culminated in the passage by our Parliament of the Freedom of Information Act, 2002. It is testimony to the inherent strength of our democratic system that it has been made obligatory for every public authority to provide information and to maintain all records consistent with its operational requirements, duly catalogued, indexed and published at prescribed intervals. Going a step further, our Parliament passed the Right to Information Act, in May 2005, providing the right to information to our citizens so that they could secure access to information under the control of public authorities. These developments also require that a member should be vigilant and equip himself with the latest, non-partisan and well-processed information to withstand enormous pressure arising out of the growing expectations from the people. All in all, it is of the utmost importance that our legislators perform their pivotal role as an intermediary between the citizens and the Government in a very purposive and meaningful way. With these words, let me once again welcome you all to the Symposium. I hope the deliberations at the Symposium will be fruitful and give a definitive direction to our legislators to strengthen their link with the people.

Thank you.

UPHOLDING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY*

I deem it a great honour and privilege to have been asked to deliver this prestigious Lecture in memory of Revered Shri Krishan Kant, former Vice-President of our country, Chairman of Rajya Sabha and a great son of India. The theme of the Lecture, 'Upholding Parliamentary Democracy', was a subject which was indeed very dear to him. The presence of so many outstanding personalities from various walks of life at this function amply testifies to the respect in which Shri Krishan Kant was held by all sections of the society and the relevance of the lofty ideals and values cherished by him. I beg to pay my humble tributes to the memory of Shri Krishan Kant who was an ardent patriot, a distinguished public figure in our national firmament, an eminent parliamentarian, an acclaimed intellectual and, above all, a fine, socially sensitive, human being who never compromised with his convictions and dedicated himself for the welfare of the people.

Friends, the life and times of Krishan Kantji provide an eloquent testimony to his abiding dedication and unwavering commitment to the cause of parliamentary democracy. He belonged to a family of illustrious freedom fighters and he himself actively participated in the struggle for the country's emancipation from foreign rule. Krishan Kantji was among those interned during the Quit India Movement. He was an activist, a visionary, a true practitioner of value-based politics and a highly revered moral force in our public life. He was also a staunch Gandhian and spearheaded the Bhoodan Movement in Punjab. As one of the young Turks, he fought against the aberrations in our political system. As a member of Parliament, I had the opportunity of witnessing his role as a very able parliamentarian, whose incisive intellect and commitment towards solving the peoples problems enriched the deliberations in Parliament.

He held many high positions in the Government, the Party and Parliament. Renowned and respected for his courage of conviction and far-sightedness, he brought to bear the distinctive imprint of his personality on the august Office of the Vice-President of India and the Chairman of Rajya Sabha. All through his public career, the cause of parliamentary democracy and welfare of the people was dearest to him. He firmly believed that upholding the highest traditions of parliamentary democracy was fundamental to our

* At the Second Krishan Kant Memorial Lecture on *Upholding Parliamentary Democracy*, New Delhi (28 November 2005).

democratic existence. He was an articulate champion of human rights and civil liberty, which undoubtedly are the cornerstones of parliamentary democracy.

As a parliamentarian, in a pioneering effort, he started the journal *Science in Parliament* to inculcate scientific temper among the parliamentary fraternity. A conscientious political activist, he campaigned against criminalisation of politics and propounded the concept of a 'negative vote' in the electoral process. Krishan Kantji was also a well-known scholar, a fine orator and prolific writer. In short, his was verily a many-splendoured personality.

He had also a long association with the well-known Servants of the People Society, founded by Lala Lajpat Rai, of which he was elected the President in 1991. Krishan Kantji rendered very commendable service in different spheres and contributed greatly to spread the ideas and ideals he and the Society espoused. The Society's objectives to enlist and train national missionaries for the service of the country and to involve them productively in various constructive activities like running educational institutions, libraries, health-care centres, etc., are undoubtedly praiseworthy. Krishan Kantji best exemplified 'The Pledge' of the Society that: 'The service of the country will occupy first place in my thoughts and in serving the country, I shall not be actuated by motives of personal advancement'.

Speaking on the theme, 'Upholding Parliamentary Democracy', one has to keep in mind the values and principles inherent in a parliamentary democracy and of its role for the socio-economic development of the country, in the context of our political and social realities. It is the sovereignty of the people and the concept of accountability which define and distinguish a parliamentary democratic system. The authority to govern emanates from the people, who are the ultimate masters in a democracy. That being so, the basis of governance in a parliamentary system has to be the inviolability of people's rights and their enforceability. Democracy, as the only system with a capacity for self-correction, offers the best framework for citizens to develop their creativity and potential to the full.

In a democratic polity, the people have the power to decide programmes and policies directly or through their representatives chosen in free and fair elections. Those who come to power through the democratic process have to be accountable to the people and their representatives at all times. Accountability of the Executive to the people, through their representatives, is the basic postulate of parliamentary democracy.

On attaining freedom, the country had to decide upon a system of governance which would best serve the interest of the nation and the people, coming out of centuries of subjugation, and evolve a structure which would

ensure achievement of socio-economic and political justice for the common man, eradication of poverty and exploitation of the disadvantaged sections of society and would provide for the basic needs of the people by ensuring universal education, an effective health care system and job opportunities for all. Our Constitution specifically enumerates the Fundamental Rights of the citizens and the Directive Principles of State Policy, providing the framework of a Welfare State, seeking to make democracy more meaningful and relevant to the common man by bringing about economic and social transformation of the society.

Strengthening a democratic structure is a constantly evolving process. John F. Kennedy once said: 'Democracy is never a final achievement. It is a call to an untiring effort'. What is needed most is an abiding commitment to make democracy work essentially for the people and in a country like ours, for pro-poor development programmes while simultaneously reinvigorating institutions and processes in all such endeavours. This necessarily requires us to promote participatory democracy characterised by free and fair elections; an independent Judiciary; a well-trained public service; transparent and accountable governance; human rights protection mechanisms; the right to information to build an informed society; a responsive and vibrant media; and the active participation of the civil society.

In our system, the Constitution has delineated specified jurisdictions and responsibilities for the organs of the State, namely the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. It is of the utmost importance that the separation of powers and checks and balances as envisioned in the Constitution and forming one of its basic features, as decided by the Supreme Court are strictly adhered to, and the organs of State work within their demarcated jurisdictions without encroaching on the powers and privileges of the others. Our Constitution does not contemplate any super-organ or essentially superior organ. For upholding our democratic set-up as our Constitution provides, it is necessary that there should be harmonious relations among them, each respecting the dignity and the essential role of the others. If the organs of State operate according to constitutional prescriptions, the scope for conflict in the exercise of powers and privileges will be minimal and this will strengthen our democratic edifice.

The Parliament is the highest representative institution in our country. Krishan Kantji drew the people's attention to that by emphasizing that 'The parliamentary institution acts as the wellsprings of national and social values. What you enact in the Parliament today, shall be enacted and replayed over and over again, in towns and villages, factories and farms, schools and colleges and in every home and family'.

For an effectively functional parliamentary system, it is of utmost importance that the conduct of the members both inside and outside the House should be exemplary and in a manner enhancing the dignity of the House. In this context, we should refer to what Krishan Kantji's said while addressing the Conference on 'Discipline and Decorum in Parliament and the State Legislatures' in the Central Hall of Parliament House in November 2001.

Parliaments are essentially political institutions and it would be naive to believe that they could be insulated from politics. Political parties have every right to use Parliament or the Legislatures as national transmission towers from where to let the people know what the parties are doing for the people and how are these parties promoting the mandate they receive. Problem arises when Parliament and the Legislatures become part of the tactics and strategies of political parties to gain specific advantages. It is this attitude which promotes the tendency to look upon Parliament and the Legislatures as some sort of theatres and, as we all know, unregulated theatres soon descend to become the theatres of the absurd.

The members of Parliament should have the commitment towards maintaining the dignity and prestige of Parliament by behaving in a manner, which will be consistent with the trust reposed in them by the people who send them to the august House of the People. It is a matter not only of great regret but of dismay and serious concern that on many occasions there are disruptions in the proceedings of the House which take place not spontaneously but because of the deliberate acts of stalling the proceedings by shouting and trooping into the well of the House, only intended not to allow the Houses of Parliament to function.

It is easy to put the blame on the Presiding Officers about their supposed inability to conduct the proceedings of the House smoothly but the people should realize that if a group of members is adamant on not allowing the Houses to function, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to regulate the proceedings in a smooth manner. One feels concerned about the future of our parliamentary democracy, if instead of participating in the proper functioning of the House, members choose deliberately to interrupt the proceedings by pre-arranged disruptionist activities.

I feel a time has come when all right-thinking members of the society, including the members of Parliament, think very seriously what direction our parliamentary democracy is taking if the elected bodies are held to ransom for narrow partisan political purposes. I feel ashamed when I find that young boys and girls and other citizens in India sitting in the visitors' gallery, or, now-a-days, seeing on the television, watch the people who have been elected to discharge their duties and made tall promises to serve the people of the country through their role in Parliament, deliberately create disturbances.

One cannot blame the well-meaning sections of the people, particularly the youth of the country, if they feel sad, if not disgusted, at the happenings that take place on occasions in different elected bodies of our country. How do we rectify the situation? All the Presiding Officers are regularly appealing to the Leaders of the different Political Parties in different Houses for cooperation and help and Leaders, from time-to-time, assure them cooperation for smooth functioning, but such assurances have become rituals as they are not meant to be kept.

Should the public opinion not be reacting to such situations? I feel that there is a great obligation imposed not only on the right thinking members of the society generally to raise their voice against such behaviour, but in my humble view, the Media has a tremendous responsibility not to publicize such activities giving prominence by way of front page headlines. I feel media can help in a big way by creating public opinion against the motivated disruptions of the proceedings of different Houses and elected bodies in our country. It is an irony that a section of the elected members of different Houses who swear by parliamentary democracy are being instrumental not only in giving a wrong impression to the country about the role of the elected members but also causing to undermine the trust of the citizens in the viability of parliamentary democracy in our country, which our Founding Fathers had, with great commitment, vision and expectations, provided as the best system of governance for our country.

I would appeal to all sections of the society to ponder over these malaise, so that the structure of parliamentary democracy in our country is not weakened. People's representatives at every level owe a duty to the country to set examples of service, concern for the people and commitment to discharge their duties and functions in accordance with the oath taken by them under the Constitution as members of the different bodies, otherwise people will lose faith in the whole system making future uncertain which will only weaken our national fabric. Thus it is imperative that we uphold the traditions and principles of parliamentary democracy, so that cynicism about the efficacy of our constitutional institutions does not overtake the minds of our people.

One important aspect of the political dimension of parliamentary democracy is a strong and vigilant Opposition Party or Parties in the Legislature. Multi-party governance and coalition Governments are increasingly coming to the fore in many democracies, including ours. While the Treasury Bench has the mandate to rule, the Opposition has to keep an unremitting vigil on the acts of omission and commission of the Government. Constructive criticism backed by viable alternative approaches, will definitely help democracy deliver better. Coalition governance having become a *fait-accompli* today, it is important to evolve and develop institutional mechanisms

and conventions so that stability is assured and effective governance is provided even under this system.

Yet another prerequisite for the long-term sustenance of parliamentary democracy is probity in public life. Corruption has been corroding the process of socio-economic transformation of our country. It is the poorer sections of society which suffer the most when corruption is rampant. Now that we have passed the Right to Information Act and the Government is building up the institutional mechanisms and structures to give effect to the provisions of the Act, we would expect its positive effect on the problem. It is in secret places that corruption thrives. As the famous thinker, Edmund Burke cautioned: 'Among a people generally corrupt liberty cannot long last'. It is, therefore, important for the institutions of governance and the civil society as such to guard against these vices eating into the vitals of our socio-political system. There is an urgent imperative to streamline our electoral and political system by completely neutralizing the role of money and muscle power and thereby help in creating more space for honest and capable persons to enter the political arena. The intelligentsia, and particularly the youth, rather than being mute spectators or indulging in leaders-bashing, should come forward to play a more constructive and proactive role in upholding the objectives, values and goals of parliamentary democracy.

We must bear in mind that political freedom without economic freedom and distributive justice is not complete, a point which was forcefully stressed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly. While development and democracy are goals each in its own right, they must be mutually reinforcible in terms of benefits to the common man. It is held that while broad-based prosperity creates stability conducive to the promotion of democracy, strong democratic institutions promote better development. With a framework of political democracy in place, we should work for bringing social and economic democracy to the center-stage of all our developmental programmes so that the fruits of progress and benefits of development are enjoyed by every one, particularly the weak and the vulnerable sections of our population.

Parliamentary democracy will lose its credibility before the common man if he is not assured of a square meal a day. The growing gap between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have-nots, is a matter of grave concern. There has to be a firm commitment on the part of all of us to achieve the goals laid down in the Constitution to mete out justice equally to all. Effective decentralization of our administrative structures will be highly beneficial in this regard. In this backdrop, we have to see closely and objectively as to how far we have been able to make a success of our democracy in making it a tool for the people's welfare. Of course, the country made substantial progress under the existing system of Government, but we have

a long and somewhat tortuous road to cross and we need to pool all our resources and efforts to reach our goal of making our country a developed one, which will be ultimately possible only if we nurture and strengthen our system of governance based on parliamentary democracy.

We should not forget that it is within the framework of the existing system that we produced the Green and the White revolutions, that we made rapid strides in space and defence-related fields, in information and communication technologies, atomic energy, etc. We succeeded in these areas because there was a national urge to succeed. With a deep sense of accountability, and a sense of commitment and drive to do so, we can achieve success in other areas also. Today our young professionals earn respectability and appreciation in every part of the world. Their performance record is second to none in the world. With such assets we can make rapid strides; if all of us act with a sense of discipline and with accountability and in an honest and transparent manner.

As our economy today is poised for an impressive growth, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that the gains of such progress percolate to the poorest of the poor and that the chasm between the rich and the poor is narrowed. In the fast-changing atmosphere of economic development, we have to keep in mind that whatever economic reforms we undertake are consistent with our national interests. Every country has its sovereign right to carve its developmental trajectory which need not be one and the same for all.

We also need to recognize the close relationship between education and the development of the country and the quality of life of the common man. The Eighty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution has provided for free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of six to fourteen years and the same has to be honestly implemented for its positive impact to come upon the lives of the people. Otherwise, they will only remain paper provisions for the people.

A successful education policy would form not only the bedrock of national development in all its dimensions but would also form the foundation for a vibrant democracy, growth of productivity, income and employment opportunities, thus offering quality life to the people. This is important for bringing about a stable social order also which is an important precondition for a stable political order. To quote Prof Amartya Sen, 'if we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure.... Not to be able to read or write or count or communicate is a tremendous deprivation....'

With the increasing pressure of growing population, education must form a crucial area of our development and economic planning which is necessary

from the point of view of allowing the citizens to succeed economically, avail of social opportunities and develop their individual potential. All efforts should be made to root out the curse of illiteracy from the country. Only with education, can we build an informed electorate and an informed democracy. With it will also come leaders of character and calibre, and we will also be able to secure gender parity, empowerment, and respect for dissent.

Yet another important dimension of parliamentary democracy, is the social empowerment without which universal adult franchise cannot be complete. We have provided for positive discrimination in favour of the deprived and the downtrodden. Our parliamentary polity provides for a level playing field and our Constitution acts like a great leveler in this regard. However, the empowerment of women is still a matter of utmost concern. An important aspect which has emerged as a result of the creation of statutory institutional structures, especially at the local Government levels, for realising the goal of self-governance is that it has enabled greater participation and involvement of women in our representative bodies. No system of Government or polity can sustain itself by ignoring this vital human resource that makes up almost half of our population. This process of democratization by including women in its fold will have a great impact on the society as a whole. Democracy in all its dimensions cannot be effective if women do not get a key role in our decision-making structures.

The importance of good governance practices in upholding parliamentary democracy cannot be over emphasized. The Directive Principles of State Policy, as enshrined in our Constitution, contain effective guidelines for good governance. In this context, judicial reforms are also a necessity keeping in view the enormous arrears in our courts. It is trite to say that justice delayed is justice denied but when justice is delayed to such an extent as we see in our country today, it becomes an injustice to all concerned. Proactive measures are required urgently to tackle this problem.

The Founding Fathers of our Constitution opted for a parliamentary democracy because they were of the firm view that democracy was the only system which would reflect the social, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of our country. Though it has had to go through various trials and tribulations, what has facilitated its march towards success is, its representative character and its resilience and vitality. In this context, I would stress that upholding democracy also warrants upholding our diverse and secular social fabric. Needless to reiterate, any attempt to subvert the secular edifice of our Republic will be catastrophic for our parliamentary system.

An inclusive society, facilitating the growth and realization of the full potential of all its different segments, can be the best vanguard and sentinel

of democracy. A fractured and fragmented society will be its worst enemy. I am reminded of what the famous French thinker and writer Andre Gide said, 'everything has been said already, but as no one listens, we must always begin again'. That is the reason why we should also be conscious of the imperfections of the system and ceaselessly strive to fine-tune it to meet the emergent situations.

Democracy, to be successful, cannot remain an abstract concept or a theory in academic works. It has to test its mettle on the anvil of reality. More importantly, it has to prove its own efficacy by making a difference to the quality of living of the common man, or else its foundations will flounder. Democracy has to facilitate meaningful dissent, enable a spirit of enquiry and ensure fundamental freedoms. In the words of Noam Chomsky: 'In this possibly terminal phase of human existence, democracy and freedom are more than just ideals to be valued—they may be essential to survival.' This is indeed a sobering thought for all of us who value our system of governance and are striving to uphold it. It calls for constant and sincere efforts from all of us to uphold democracy at all times, for the challenges to democracy are many and varied in dimensions.

Economic prosperity for a few alone is not enough; prosperity should reach the nook and corner of our country if we have to uphold the fundamentals of democracy. As Swami Vivekananda said: 'a few thousand graduates do not make a nation, a few rich men do not make a nation'. Democracy has to be able to touch the lives of every citizen, positively. The rising expectations of the people have their own momentum. If the governance structures are not able to cope with such expectations, the avalanche of popular aspirations can sweep aside the limited material progress of the few in its wake. The country must excel in all fields—be it agriculture, science and technology, information technology, business, industry, education, sports, arts and culture and the fruits of that national excellence have to reach every citizen. We should also have a level-playing field where every citizen would have adequate opportunities to excel and that will be the most befitting tribute to our parliamentary democracy.

Friends, I do agree that we still have a long way to go in realizing the vision of our Founding Fathers. We need to continue to strive hard to make our democracy relevant for large sections of our people. We should not, however, let our inadequacies so far dampen our enthusiasm for democracy. Sustaining democracy we must address the concerns of the common people and celebrate our success in consolidating democracy. The negative public perception of politics and of those in public life should not be permitted to cloud the minds of the younger generations. Rather, they should be made to recognize that it is our collective and common responsibility to evolve ways

and means to perfect our system of governance, rather than finding fault with it and running away from their responsibilities towards it. Ultimately, the people are the best sentinels of democracy.

People, ordinary citizens, are at the centre of democracy. If we are in a position to claim that democracy has come of age in our country, that it is here to stay, the major part of the credit for it goes to our people. They are the ones who have shown to the world their unquestionable capability and commitment to work a democratic system in the country. They are the ones, who have brought about changes in the Government, with enormous sense of responsibility and uncanny wisdom, 6 out of 14 times that we went through the General Elections—in most cases, proving the political pundits, and astrologers wrong. Our Founding Fathers had full faith and confidence in the ability of our so called 'ill-fed and illiterate' people to run a democratic system. When Jawaharlal Nehru was confronted with the question 'after Nehru who', his studied response was '360 million people'. He was referring to our total population then. They had such unqualified faith in our people's ability to run a democratic system, seeing in every citizen a potential leader to run the affairs of the State.

Our people demonstrate such extra-ordinary sense of responsibility and discretion in exercising their franchise. They expect of those in the arena of politics to be responsible, to be accountable and to be transparent in their functioning. They expect of the leaderships to provide stable Governments, to pursue larger national values, as opposed to narrow partisan agenda. They expect of those in power to perform well, keeping the larger national interest and the interest of the common people in mind. We have seen, in the past that whenever the people perceived political action bordering on irresponsibility, sometimes resulting in political instability, they have punished those responsible, whenever they perceived popular mandate being misused to undermine democracy from within, at the earliest opportunity they had, the people exercised their judgment to safeguard democracy. These are all the achievements of the common citizens in working our democracy. What they demand of the political leadership, quite justifiably, is responsible behaviour, using power as an instrument to effectively serve the people.

I, therefore, believe that upholding parliamentary democracy is not a luxurious option before us; it is a necessity, for us as a nation. I am of the firm opinion that there is no alternative for us but to strengthen the structure that we have. Our common people have already identified themselves totally with the system. It is for all of us together to address the imperfections and shortcomings, within the framework of the system. Since it is out of our Parliament that the leadership that runs the affairs of our country emerges, we have to ensure that people with commitment and dedication to the cause

of the people come into it and have the opportunity to actively participate in working the system which will have its due impact on the quality of living of the people. Only in the hands of a united and an eternally 'vigilant citizenry' will our democracy be safe. A great responsibility is thus cast upon all of us in sustaining parliamentary democracy, our freedom and democratic rights, and, more than anything else, in sustaining our people's faith in the institutions of our democracy. If we all faithfully discharge those responsibilities, nothing can ever undermine it.

Friends, today, no one will doubt the need to uphold this system for the success of democracy in the country, in our region and in the world at large nor will anyone doubt our ability to run a democratic system in the country. As an eminent British columnist Bernard Levin, speaking on the *'Paradoxes of Democracy'*, observed, 'if the democracy of India falls, the end of democracy itself will be in sight'! We cannot afford to take even minor threats to democracy lightly. To quote Levin again... 'remember that every nation that has fallen from democracy into tyranny was at one time only remotely in danger, and we would do well to think of ways that can strengthen our defences.'

We need statesmen, we need visionaries, we need sagacious leadership, to steer the ship of the nation. Our endeavour should be to carry all sections of our people with us in the task of working a democratic system. The institutions of governance, particularly the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary, along with a watchful media, public-spirited civil service, and a vigilant civil society can all be collaborative partners in this national endeavour to uphold parliamentary democracy.

Providing institutions of governance is much easier than making them function in a manner sensitive to the needs of the people, accommodating the concerns of the marginalised, and with an all-inclusive and long-term vision for the whole country. Towards the end of the deliberations of our Constituent Assembly, its President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, exhorted its Members stating: 'We have prepared a democratic Constitution. But successful working of democratic institutions requires in those who have to work them willingness to respect the view-points of others, capacity for compromise and accommodation'....

In a plural society like India, the representative institutions are what late V. K. Krishna Menon called 'the safety valves' in the larger social system. It is through the forum of our Parliament that the commitment to democracy is best expressed in India. Most important requirement for democratic institutions to perform well is to create conditions for those institutions to function. If institutions invested with the responsibility to hold the Government

and the administration accountable on a continuous basis are not allowed to function in an orderly manner, we will be missing important democratic options for ensuring accountability in governance. To my mind, democracy cannot be sustained unless everyone associated with its functioning demonstrates a democratic spirit. It is of utmost importance to facilitate the functioning of democratic institutions and to use them as effective fora before which all other institutions of governance ultimately have to submit.

India has today matured as a thriving parliamentary system, earning approbation from far and wide as the largest working democracy in the world. The country is fast emerging as an economic power to be reckoned with by the world at large. The challenge before us is how to utilize our democratic and parliamentary heritage for the betterment of our masses. Mahatma Gandhi prophetically emphasized, 'The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within.' With our own democratic credentials so far, it is not difficult to ensure that an atmosphere conducive for the healthy survival of democracy prevails in the country at all times.

Friends, in a farsighted comment on the working of our democracy, Krishan Kantji, who was ever an optimist, once said:

True, the Indian democracy could have done a lot more and a lot better. It could have delivered a lot more material prosperity to its citizens. It could have done a lot more to give them a sense of security, dignity and honour. It could have done a lot more to save them from cynicism about their representatives and the representative institutions. Our balance sheet as a democratic nation may not be very flattering; and yet, India deserves the world's gratitude for, so strenuously and so purposefully sustaining and deepening democracy for over one-sixth of all humanity. Those who say that India is hostage to its brand of democracy, scarcely understand how deeply attached are the Indian people to their democracy...

As you all know, Krishan Kantji belonged to a generation which linked the memorable era of our freedom struggle with that of the nation-building endeavours of the post-Independence India. If the struggle for freedom and Independence was long and arduous, no less has been the task and challenge of nation building and propelling India to its rightful position among the comity of nations. In Krishan Kantji's own words, 'Nation-building is never a painless process'. There is a perception that the cherished ideals which guided the freedom struggle are increasingly getting eroded. It falls upon us that we strive to take the country forward on the path of peace, progress and prosperity with the same zeal, vigour and enthusiasm that the Founding Fathers of our nation and sagacious leaders like Krishan Kantji displayed during the freedom struggle.

As I said earlier, upholding parliamentary democracy is a collective responsibility in which every citizen has to contribute his or her mite. We have the tradition built up by stalwarts like Late Krishan Kantji to emulate; we can derive inspiration from his many splendoured personality to uphold democracy as a way of life in our country. With these words, I once again pay my tribute to this outstanding leader of our times.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again thank the Servants of the People Society for having associated me with the Second Krishan Kant Memorial Lecture. I am also happy that you have chosen the occasion to honour the memory of Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the heroes of our freedom movement, by releasing his collected works here this evening. I wish the Society all success in its endeavours towards the furtherance of the lofty ideas and values for which Shri Krishan Kantji and other great men and women who contributed immensely to our freedom movement and to the building of modern India, making innumerable sacrifices, lived.

Thank you.

EMERGENCE OF COALITION ERA: A SILENT REVOLUTION IN THE INDIAN POLITICAL HISTORY*

I take it as an honour to have been called upon to release Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty's book *Forging Power*. Prof. Chakrabarty is a highly accomplished academician, now heading the Department of Political Science at the University of Delhi. This is a commendable addition to his other academic works on Public Administration and other aspects of political science. In *Forging Power*, he has made a remarkable effort to explain in a lucid style, the dynamics of coalition governance, which is of central importance at a time when there is a clear trend towards coalitions as an answer to fractured mandates and political uncertainties in our democratic set-up.

With the kind of heterogeneity that we have, with more than a billion population, and over 1,600 linguistic groups, variegated ethnicities, multiple religious affiliations, coupled with the incredible sub-strata of castes, communities and cultures, to expect these diversities not to be reflected in our political life, to my mind, is unrealistic. If I may borrow an expression from esteemed V.P. Singhji, 'India itself is a coalition'. Such a social set-up presupposes that the democratic system should develop credible mechanisms to ensure adequate representation of diverse sections of our population in the political processes and ensure that their concerns and considerations are adequately recognized and a distinctive roadmap for their welfare is articulated in the public policies.

Parliamentary democracy is essentially a competitive system sustained by majoritarian notions, but providing space for varieties of political persuasions to co-exist and compete for the ruling space. The key to success in securing power lies in the hands of the people, who are in a commanding position to decide as to which party or coalition of parties should articulate their interests in the Legislatures. As such, the Legislative Bodies are expected to reflect the collective will of the people, and mirror the social and political realities of our society.

Our Constitution prescribes various measures to provide political space and tools of empowerment to the marginalized groups and classes. But as we have seen, over the years, the extent of empowerment has not been up to the

* At the release of the book *Forging Power*, New Delhi (30 November 2005).

requirement or expectations of such groups and classes and they rightly have recognized the importance of wielding political power as an instrument for effectively addressing their own peculiar problems and concerns. To my mind, this recognition of the importance of wielding political power directly has contributed, in many ways, to the situation of what Prof. Chakrabarty describes as the 'inevitability of coalition governance' in the country today.

Over the decades, the political base of major national parties has undergone a transformation. The one-party dominance of the early years of Independence has slowly given way to political pluralism across the country. As the author points out, the intense politicization of each and every section of the Indian society, through the years, has made the one-party dominant model redundant. Correspondingly, regional parties started flourishing and many smaller parties acquired an important say in the political formulations. The success of these regional and smaller parties may perhaps be attributed, as Prof. Chakrabarty writes, to their effective articulation of the interests of the backward classes and other vulnerable groups. At the same time, the idea of coalition has emerged as a viable alternative to the era of one-party dominance, which, as Prof. Chakrabarty delineates in his book, is an arrangement in which both the values of unity and diversity are equally legitimized and respected.

A close scrutiny of our democratic experience shows that coalition governance is not something new to us and that it existed even in the pre-Independence era when the Interim Government was formed under the leadership of Pandit Nehru in 1946. Since then, the nature and scope of our party system and that of the Government have undergone a major change. Initially, the Congress Party itself acted as a 'rainbow' coalition of different interest groups and individuals. It was only in the year 1967 that its dominance was challenged and non-Congress coalitions came into existence in several States. These coalitions were, however, short-lived since they consisted of varied and ideologically dissimilar political parties lacking broad consensus. It is thus obvious that a coalition Government not based on a consensus, a broad-based programme, and without an intra-coalition mechanism for interaction among coalition partners, often leads to instability. Prof. Chakrabarty has observed that though the 1967 coalition experiment in different parts of the country was short-lived, it did, however, help in providing an alternative theoretical conceptualization of Government-formation. What was lacking then was ideological congruity among partners to broaden the possibilities for a coalition to work harmoniously for a stable formation, otherwise it tends to weaken the coalition.

The most pertinent question in this regard is: how do we ensure political stability in an era of coalitions? To my mind, to make coalitions viable and

durable, it is necessary to make serious efforts prior to the election to accommodate the sensibilities and sensitivities of various partners within and outside the coalition, without, of course, compromising on one's core ideological affiliations and commitments. The divergent and incompatible interests of coalition partners should be reconciled in such a manner that the mutually agreeable objectives of the coalition partners could be accomplished. Such an understanding based on a broad-based programme acceptable to all may allow the coalition to withstand irritants in governance and to ensure that the goals of socio-economic development are met. This, to my mind, is the point to be noted about more than a quarter-century old coalition experiment in West Bengal under the leadership of Shri Jyoti Basu, which is being ably carried forward by Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharya today.

On this point, I feel that Prof. Chakrabarty's study could have addressed itself to a deeper analysis of the West Bengal model of coalition which has stood the test of time and has created a world record of being in power for over twenty-eight years through six Assembly elections. A study of coalition politics in India will be incomplete without giving adequate space to the most successful coalition experiments in Kerala and West Bengal since the past more than a quarter century. Some of the issues involved go beyond the realm of the theories. I am bringing in this point not because of my Party's role in it, but I feel, academically this is a matter deserving serious analysis.

Without doubt, one of the key elements that has gone into the success of this experiment has been the vision, commitment and dynamism of Shri Jyoti Basu, who as the leader of his Party and as the leader of the Left Front, led the coalition on behalf of his Party, in successive elections and provided effective leadership to the Government taking all other partners with him, for a quarter century, even when his own Party had majority of its own to run the Government. Running a single Party Government is much easier than running a coalition, where reconciling the conflicting interests of the partners could be a demanding task. The fact that Shri Jyoti Basu could do it was in tune with his Party's decision to unify progressive forces to work together for the benefit of the common people.

Academics may miss the significance of these points. In this context, I must also draw your attention to a very thoughtful comment made by the respected Communist leader Shri E.M.S Namboodiripad in the wake of the emergence of the Government under the leadership of Shri V.P. Singh in 1989. He had foreseen in that Government the emergence of the era of coalition in Indian politics and went on to claim that it was here to stay. The inevitability of coalitions in India is the central argument of Prof. Chakrabarty also. But this fact that was foreseen more than fifteen years back talks about the understanding and farsightedness of the leaders who could feel the direction

of political changes taking place in the country, much ahead of their times. When he made those comments, many viewed them as premature. But the developments since then speak for themselves.

Friends, in the light of our recent experience, people have now come to take cognizance of the reality of coalition Governments in the country. There is, however, a tendency to believe that coalitions lead to instability. This, I must say, is a misconception. It may be observed that most of the pre-election coalitions that we have witnessed have been able to provide stable Governments, as we have seen in West Bengal and Kerala over the years. At the national level too, coalitions have become the order of the day, notwithstanding the political instability which we underwent in the late 1980s and through the 1990s.

As Prof. Chakrabarty argues, rather than being seen as inherently unstable formations, coalitions may be the need of the times in a highly pluralistic country like India, strengthening the democratic impulse and representing the otherwise marginalized groups. The political reality today is that coalition politics has come to stay. Prof. Chakarbarty rightly emphasizes that by accepting coalitions as inevitable, political parties are also involved in a critical way in a process whereby our political system and its ideological contours are being dramatically altered and defined. His observation that a coalition, to be stable and lasting, should be based on sound principles and convergence of policies and programmes rather than on political expediency, provides the guidelines for our political parties to pay heed to. To this if I may add, there should be a spirit of accommodation towards each other without any rigidity or attempts to obtain any special benefits at the expense of other partners.

One may call the emergence of the coalition era in India as a silent revolution in our political history. The growing practice of parties extending support to the Government from outside, without being a part of it, is a new phenomenon that merits special attention of the scholars and analysts. Our whole system of governance and every office within it, including even that of the office of the Speaker, has been impacted by the emergence of the coalition phase in our politics. The most visible impact of this is the broadening of the representational base in our democracy. Larger segments of our people have begun to feel that they now have a greater and more decisive say in the political decision-making processes, thus enhancing the legitimacy of our democracy itself.

Prof. Chakarbarty, in *Forging Power*, has attempted a very instructive study of the dynamics of coalition governance in our country. His perceptive analysis of coalition politics and the stresses and strains on governance under a coalition structure make for very interesting reading. His conclusion that the 'Indian experiment is not only a creative articulation of the idea of democracy itself,

but it is also innovative in terms of political institution sustaining its spirit and fervour and giving it distinctive localized characteristic within the larger universal paradigm of liberal democracy' is a very positive tribute not only to our commitment to democracy, but to our people's ability and ingenuity to come up with appropriate responses to the political situations as they emerge before them.

I would, however, like to conclude with a caution that our people cannot be taken for granted, on any aspect of democratic functioning. Their prudence and discretion are beyond questioning. Today they are not ready to settle for rhetoric, they will not give away stability for variety, they will not settle to be fed on emotive issues as an alternative to effective performance. They demand of the political leadership to be responsible, to provide a stable political order, to deliver in a manner addressing their concerns, the concerns of the common man, otherwise, they are capable of exercising their judgment in a manner that would not leave much of a choice to those in the arena of politics and that choice, could well be beyond prediction, as has been the experience on several occasions in the past.

I am sure, Prof. Chakarbarty's work will be found very useful and informative by not only those who are interested in the study of political processes and structures but also those who are keen to better understand the fast changing domain of legislative bodies and legislative behaviour in the country. *Forging Power* is a worthy addition to the available literature on our political system. I compliment Prof. Chakrabarty on providing us such an informed analysis of the changing dimensions of the Indian Government and politics. The Oxford Publishers also deserve to be heartily commended for the good work they have done.

With these words, I have great pleasure in releasing Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty's *Forging Power*.

Thank you.

ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY IN STRENGTHENING THE NATION*

I feel greatly honoured to have been invited at the function to mark the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly and I thank you all for providing me this opportunity to be here with you this morning. At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Hon'ble Speaker Shri K. R. Suresh Reddy, and the members of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly on this historic occasion, marking the Golden Jubilee of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly. I would also like to congratulate the people of Andhra Pradesh who are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the State from the first day of November this year. The creation of this linguistic State and its Legislative Assembly in 1956 was a momentous event, which brought together the industrious and dedicated Telugu people of this politically conscious and culturally rich land.

It was here in Andhra Pradesh that many eminent personalities of modern India, cutting across the political spectrum, were initiated into the challenging field of public service and later served the people with commendable zeal, devotion and personal sacrifice. As the State and its Legislative Assembly are celebrating the Golden Jubilee, it is our pious duty to recall the remarkable contributions made by legendary leaders like Alluri Sitarama Raju, Potti Sree Ramulu, Swami Ramananda Teertha, Boorgula Rama Krishna Rao, P. Sundarayya, D. Sanjeevaiah, Maqdum Mohiuddin, T. Prakasam, M. Basavapunnaiah, T. Nagi Reddy, V.V.Giri, N. Sanjeeva Reddy, N.T. Rama Rao, P.V. Narasimha Rao, to name only a few, who made significant impact on the State and, in varied ways, on the country as a whole.

Three of my illustrious predecessors – M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, Dr. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy and G.M.C. Balayogi – started their distinguished political career here. Sarojini Naidu and Durgabai Deshmukh represented the best of our women's traditions in our national life. The contributions and commitment to our public life displayed by all of them continue to inspire us in more ways than one. The people in the Telangana region in particular, who waged a valiant armed struggle against the oppression unleashed by the then Nizam rule which accelerated the process of the integration of the State with the rest of the country, deserve special tributes.

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* At the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly on *Role of Parliamentary Democracy in Strengthening the Nation*, Hyderabad (3 December 2005).

All of you who have gathered here today have a golden history to preserve and cherish and I am sure all of you will tread on the path illumined by your eminent predecessors. As the Legislative Assembly celebrates its Golden Jubilee, we should recall their remarkable contributions in strengthening parliamentary democracy and in facilitating nation-building and make a resolve that we shall strive to fulfil their dreams of a vibrant and prosperous India.

Friends, every Legislature is a symbol of democracy, of independence and the sovereignty of the people. Fifty years may not be a long period in the history of a State, but for a new born State's people's institution, this was a crucial phase for laying the foundations for institution-building and for making the right beginnings for transforming the lives of the people for the better. It is expected of those associated with the representative institutions to introspect and evaluate the efficacy of its involvement with the cause of its basic constituents, *i.e.* the people, and through them, the nation.

Coming to the subject of today's Address, *Role of Parliamentary Democracy in Strengthening the Nation*, according to me, in our country's present circumstances, we cannot think of any better alternative to parliamentary democracy in addressing the concerns of our people. The choice of parliamentary democracy for free India reflected our deep resolve to preserve the pluralistic character of our society and to strengthen the integrity and sovereignty of our nation. As such, the Constitution that we adopted in 1950 took into consideration the inherent democratic ethos and diversity of our people, which, as our Founding Fathers realized early during the freedom struggle, as having helped substantially in the democratic growth of the nation and in nurturing the finest of democratic values among our people.

It was expected that our legislative bodies would verily emerge as the people's fora where various social and economic issues would be articulated and policies formulated based upon the deliberation and debate in a manner consistent with the constitutional obligations and maintaining the dignity and decorum of the elected bodies. But, unfortunately, there is a justified strong feeling among the people that over the years there has been a decline in the standards of our legislative bodies. We all need to remind ourselves, time and again, that democracy is a system based on dialogue and debate. It can thrive only if everyone involved demonstrates proper spirit of tolerance, dignified behaviour and an unconditional commitment to submit oneself to the norms of sound democratic practices.

It is a matter not only of great regret but of dismay and serious concern that on many occasions there are disruptions in the proceedings of the elected bodies which take place not spontaneously but because of the deliberate acts

of stalling the proceedings by shouting and trooping into the well of the House, only intending not to allow the Houses to function. One feels concerned about the future of our representative democracy, if instead of participating in the proper functioning of the House, members choose deliberately to interrupt the proceedings by pre-arranged disruptionist activities. I feel a time has come when all right-thinking members of the society, including the members of Parliament and of different State Assemblies, think very seriously what direction our parliamentary democracy is taking if the elected bodies are held to ransom for partisan political purposes.

Should the public opinion not be reacting to such situations? I feel that there is a great obligation imposed not only on the right thinking members of the society generally to raise their protest against such behaviour, but I believe, the media has a tremendous responsibility not to publicize such activities giving prominence by way of front page headlines. I feel media can help in a big way by creating public opinion against the motivated disruptions of the proceedings of different Houses and elected bodies in our country. It is imperative that we uphold the traditions and principles of parliamentary democracy, so that cynicism about the efficacy of our constitutional institutions does not overtake the minds of our people.

In a way we should all feel ashamed of the fact that millions of our people have still not been emancipated from the vicious cycle of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, poor health care, gender-based prejudices and other economic and social infirmities and especially in the case of the disadvantaged and marginalised sections. The conditions of the working class are no better. I am sure you will agree with me that the prevalence of medieval practices like untouchability and system of two glasses, in howsoever limited areas, does not reflect well on the efficacy of our system. For parliamentary democracy to retain its relevance to a common man, it is most essential that we address these challenges in a concerted manner with commitment to its basic values and people's rights.

As representatives of the people, we must closely follow even the subtlest changes in their needs, aspirations and grievances so that inputs from grass root level could be transferred to the decision-making processes and through such endeavours, we will be able to help strengthen our parliamentary edifice. If any substantial segment of the population has reasons to feel strongly dissatisfied with the performance of the system, or for perceived failures in addressing genuine grievances, it is incumbent upon the system to apply democratic methods to address such issues. In this process, political Parties have to play a very constructive role. The other organs of State like the Executive and the Judiciary, a vigilant media and a vibrant civil society can also be important components of a successful parliamentary democracy.

Friends, our Founding Fathers were convinced that it was necessary for the success of democracy in India to define and demarcate the respective jurisdictions of the three organs of State – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. Likewise, they envisioned constitutional provisions to so regulate their relationship that each one of them functions within its jurisdiction and conducts its business in such manner that the other's jurisdiction is not encroached upon. It is imperative that this constitutional balance is maintained at all times if we have to further strengthen our parliamentary democratic set-up.

In our representative polity, free and fair elections constitute the foundation of democracy. Equally important for upholding parliamentary democracy and strengthening the nation is the absolute integrity of those who run the system. It is in this context that the legislators have a social obligation to check the menace of corruption. We all know that corruption has made inroads into our public life which is an alarming trend that threatens to erode the standing of our democratic institutions as the agents of social change. As such, legislators need not only to use their privileged position to take corrective steps to deal with the menace but also to set a worthy example before the people. Now that we have passed the Right to Information Act and the Government is building up the institutional mechanisms and structures to give effect to the provisions of the Act, we would expect its positive salutary effect on the problem.

It is important for the institutions of governance and the civil society to guard against undesirable elements entering into the political arena. There is an urgent imperative to streamline our electoral and political system by completely neutralizing the role of money and muscle power, thereby helping in the creation of more space for honest and capable persons to enter the institutions of democracy at every level.

We also need to take effective measures to address the issues like illiteracy, gender-inequity, effective decentralization, upholding the federal principles, amongst others, if we have to strengthen democracy in the country. Democracy cannot be effective if women do not get a key role in our decision-making structures and if our people do not have the benefit of at least basic education. Empowerment of women is still a matter of utmost urgency. No system of Government or polity can sustain itself by ignoring this vital human resource that makes up almost half of our population.

I must say that despite all its drawbacks and imperfections and the fact of its having gone through various trials and tribulations, we have succeeded in maintaining the representative character of a democratic set-up in our country. In this context, I would also like to stress that upholding democracy also warrants the upholding of our secular fabric. Any attempt to subvert the

secular edifice of our Republic will be destructive of our parliamentary system as well as of our unity and integrity. An inclusive society, facilitating the growth and realization of the full potential of all its different segments, can be the best vanguard and sentinel of democracy. A fractured and fragmented society will be its worst enemy.

Fortunately, our people are fully committed to parliamentary ideals. People, ordinary citizens, are at the centre of democracy. Our people have shown to the world, time and again, their political maturity, unquestionable capability and commitment to make a democratic system functional in the country. They brought about changes in the Government, with enormous sense of responsibility and uncanny wisdom, six out of fourteen times that we went through the General Elections, in most cases, proving the political pundits, and astrologers wrong.

In our Legislatures, the efficacy of our parliamentary polity and the vitality of our nation are put to test on a continuous basis. It is on the floor of the Legislatures that accountability of our political system has to be ensured. That being so, it is of utmost importance that the members, chosen to represent the people, remain ever vigilant and sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the people and committed to serve them. At the same time, they should refrain from doing anything that could undermine the efficacy of parliamentary democracy for the country. The people's right to recall a representative who fails to live up to their expectations is an important democratic tool that can help in infusing a better sense of accountability among the legislators and I plead for its incorporation in our electoral system.

For the Government to be effective *vis-à-vis* the people, it is important for us to demolish what my learned friend Fali S. Nariman calls 'the wall that separates the people from the government'. To quote him: "We simply cannot hope to give justice to the people unless we citizens (in all walks of life) bring down this artificial wall of separation and become sensitive to the needs, expectations and aspirations of the general mass of the people".

The most crucial factor for the survival of democracy is to sustain our people's faith in the system which can be ensured only if the leaders, particularly the people's representatives, conduct themselves as role models, in a manner helping to reinforce the people's faith in the system. Our young people should be able to draw inspiration from the institutions of democracy and from the people who represent them there. They should realize that it is out of their representative institutions that those who provide leadership to the Government and the Administration emerge. We need exemplary leadership, and as such, people of calibre and commitment should not shy away from associating themselves with the representative institutions. They should come forward to shoulder the responsibilities expected of citizens in a democracy.

Gandhiji once wrote, 'I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved came from duty well done. The very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world...' I would, therefore, call upon the youth, the intelligentsia and the social activists to come in to the mainstream of national life and contribute their share for strengthening democracy. The first step in this direction is that of strengthening people's institutions. Only a Legislature comprised of members with vision, integrity, dedication, commitment, skill and wisdom can effectively serve the people.

The Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly has been a very vibrant and vigilant watchdog and sentinel of democracy during the last five decades of its existence. I must compliment it for enacting laws like the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959; the Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Act, 1964; the Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms (Land Ceiling) Act, 1973; the Lok Ayukta and Up-Lok Ayukta Act, 1983; and the Hindu Succession Act, 1985 which exemplify the good work done by legislative bodies in India. As you celebrate your Golden Jubilee, it is imperative that you rededicate yourselves to upholding the highest traditions of parliamentary democracy and, in the process, further strengthen the ideals and values cherished by our nation.

I would like to conclude with a universal truth uttered almost a century ago in Telugu by Maha Kavi Gurajada Appa Rao:

'Deshamante Matti Kadoi – Deshamante Manushuloi' which is phonetically similar to its Hindi equivalent: *'Desh ka matalab mitti nahi – Desh ka matalab manushya hai'* Let these words be the guiding principle for all of us in our race to achieve better world for our people. In this race we cannot afford to run slow. I am encouraged by the presence of many young law makers in this chamber. I am sure, they will greatly contribute towards making parliamentary democracy more meaningful in achieving the goal of nation-building.

I have learnt that on the first day of the sitting of this august body on 3 December 1956, Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly debated a Call Attention motion moved by Late Shri V. Gopala Krishnaiah, expressing concern over steep increase in the prices of essential commodities. I hope that the concern for the common man's problems continues to echo in this temple erected by the people. With these words, let me once again congratulate all of you on this historic and momentous occasion and wish you all the very best in your endeavours to lead the people of Andhra Pradesh, and through them, the country on the path of peace, progress and prosperity.

Thank you.

LEGISLATIVE DRAFTING: THE TECHNIQUES AND THE KNOW-HOW*

I am happy to be here today at the Twenty-first International Training Programme in Legislative Drafting being organised by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST). Ever since its inception in 1976, it has been the constant endeavour of the BPST to provide opportunities, among others, to parliamentary officials to familiarize themselves with the nuances and intricacies of various parliamentary processes and procedures. Legislative Drafting is one such Programme being conducted by the Bureau. Introduced in 1985, the Programme in Legislative Drafting has already provided training to 224 participants from foreign countries till date. I am indeed pleased to learn that the Programme has been found very useful and informative by all participants and we are greatly encouraged by this positive response.

The basic objective of this Training Programme in Legislative Drafting is to inculcate in you a perceptive appreciation of the role and responsibility of the Parliament and the parliamentarians insofar as drafting of legislation is concerned, and to train you in various techniques and knowhow of legislative drafting. I am sure the Programme will prove to be of great value to all of you in the task of drafting of legislation in your respective Parliaments.

Today, there is hardly any aspect of our lives which is not affected by one statute or the other. The era of rapid scientific and technological advancements has undoubtedly impacted the task of legislation as well, making the process of drafting a legislation much more challenging. The quality of governance in a country largely depends on the quality of laws prevalent there. One of the fundamentals of good governance is that a law should represent and reflect the collective will of the people of a nation. It is of paramount importance that the citizens for whom a law is enacted, should be readily able to ascertain and reason the law. Therein lies the significance of good legislative drafting.

The first and foremost requirement of good legislative drafting is undoubtedly to have a clear understanding of the objects and reasons which

* At the inauguration of the Twenty-first International Training Programme in Legislative Drafting, organised by the BPST, New Delhi (12 December 2005).

necessitate and justify the intended legislation. In addition to having a fair degree of knowledge about the subject matter of the legislation, the draftsman has to be thorough in his understanding of the fundamental law of the land, i.e., the Constitution of the country; its existing statute book; relevant precedents and judicial pronouncements; and the nature and scope of the Fundamental Rights as enshrined in the Constitution like ours. He is also required to keep in mind the existing political and administrative institutions and processes.

Every piece of legislation is meant to achieve certain socio-economic and political goal or goals—sometimes for the whole citizenry and sometimes for a particular segment of the population and it should ultimately reflect, in true letter and spirit, the needs and aspirations of the intended beneficiary.

A legislation cannot afford to be hypothetical or metaphorical. The command over the language and its proper application are very crucial to good legislative drafting. Legislation should be complete in its meaning and easy to comprehend. It should have the potential to communicate the meaning directly, precisely and concisely. The terminologies and technical terms must also carry precise connotations, leaving no scope for uncertainty or difference of opinion.

Law must have lucidity, clarity and constitutional conformity. This requires that due attention be given to each and every minute detail of a law before it becomes a final enactment. Such perfection takes years of hard work and experience. In this context, a well-defined and scientific training programme in legislative drafting will be of the greatest help.

The processes and procedures of legislative drafting vary from country to country, yet there is an element of universality in the techniques and expertise to frame a good legislation. Besides the Bill *per se*, legislative drafting also includes the framing of statutory orders, rules, regulations and other instructions by the concerned Departments of the Government and other forms of delegated legislation.

Coming to our country, it is the Constitution of India which is the supreme law of the land. Each organ of the State—the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary—draws its existence from it. Insofar as the legislations are concerned, it is the Executive which has the duty to initiate and formulate legislative and financial proposals and place them before the Parliament. Our Parliament has been given unlimited power to call for information, to discuss, to scrutinize and to finally approve the legislative proposals made by the Executive. An independent and impartial Judiciary has the mandate to interpret the laws.

The Bills in our country are classified into the Government Bills and Private Members' Bills. The Government Bills are sponsored by the concerned Ministry. It is the Ministry of Law which has been assigned the job of drafting the Bill. In the case of Private Members' Bills, the drafting skills of parliamentary officials prove to be of great help as the members are often in need of assistance.

We have a large network of Parliamentary Committees. Very often, Bills are referred to the Departmentally-Related Standing Committees and Select Committees for detailed examination and scrutiny. If the parliamentary officials are well-groomed in the skills and techniques of legislative drafting, they could assist members in scrutinizing the Bills and improving them at the Committee stage before the Bills take the final shape. As such, the officials need to be trained in the art and science of legislative drafting.

I understand that in the next two months, you would be given intensive training in legislative drafting not only through lectures by experts in various related disciplines but also through attachment with the Ministry of Law and Justice and other institutions, including the Law Commission of India, the Election Commission of India and the National Human Rights Commission. I am informed that you will also be attached to one of the State Legislatures of our country for a week to get a feel of the legislative processes in our Legislative Assemblies. In Shri C. K. Jain, Honorary Officer and former Secretary-General of Lok Sabha, you have a highly experienced Course Director, well-versed with various aspects of legislative drafting.

I am sure, this Training Programme would go a long way in helping all of you deepen your grasp and understanding of legislative drafting, enhance your professional knowledge and skill and update you with the ongoing developments in the field in order to meet the emerging challenges. Since we have participation from different countries, all of you can use this opportunity to get benefited by interacting with one another and by exchanging your experiences. I wish you all the very best in your endeavours.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Twenty-first International Training Programme in Legislative Drafting.

Thank you.

CHALLENGES CONFRONTING DEMOCRACY IN THE ASIA REGION*

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all to the Inaugural Function of the Second India and the Asia Regions CPA Conference held in this historic city of Delhi. As you are all aware, Pakistan was to have hosted this Conference. However, the devastating earthquake that hit many parts of Pakistan and parts of India resulted in the Conference being held in Delhi instead of Islamabad. I extend my heart-felt condolences to the bereaved families of those who lost their lives in the natural calamity. Our meeting here today reflects our collective will to tide over the difficulties and cooperate in various ways for the welfare of our peoples.

Let me also take this opportunity to once again felicitate Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, the respected Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, on his election as the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I am sure this Conference will stand to benefit from his rich and varied experience.

We are gathered here today under the aegis of the CPA. Through a series of Conferences, Seminars, Workshops, etc., the CPA has been engaged in building an informed parliamentary community able to deepen the Commonwealth's democratic commitment and to further cooperation among Parliaments and Legislatures and the CPA. With a membership of about 15,000 parliamentarians in nearly 170 National, State, Provincial and Territorial Parliaments, the CPA has been doing a commendable job in promoting understanding and cooperation among the Commonwealth Community and in promoting the study and respect for good parliamentary practices. This Conference is a part of the CPA's mission to promote the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance. Regional Conferences like this provide a platform to the parliamentarians of a particular region to sit together, discuss the problems afflicting the region and learn from one another's experiences.

Friends, during this Conference, we will have the opportunity to discuss two very important subjects, namely 'Tackling Natural Disasters in the

* At the inauguration of the Second India and Asia Regions Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference, New Delhi (17 December 2005).

Region—Need for Synergic Efforts among the Nations of the Region', and 'Tackling the Problems of Development facing Children and the Role of Parliaments'. Both the issues have far-reaching implications for India as well as for the countries of the Asia Region.

In recent years, hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives, many rendered homeless and many more thousands of children orphaned due to natural disasters. Experience has shown that no place on earth is immune from natural disasters. The Indian Ocean tsunami, the drought and locust problems in Africa, the hurricanes and cyclones in the United States and the Caribbean, the floods and earthquakes in Europe and Asia have caused large-scale devastation. The humankind, rich or poor, have found themselves totally helpless against the fury of nature.

We all know that we cannot prevent most of these disasters but we can certainly prepare ourselves and be better equipped to withstand these calamities. It is here that the 'Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015' adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Japan in January 2005, assumes added significance. The Hyogo Framework, among other things, seeks to strengthen the capacity of disaster-prone countries to address risk and invest in disaster preparedness. It would also serve as a blue-print for nations, international organizations, civil society groups and other stakeholders to invest in poverty reduction and disaster prevention so as to build resilient communities and save lives.

Asia, in particular the South Asia Region, is extremely vulnerable to natural calamities. Floods, droughts, cyclones and earthquakes have frequently struck our region with ferocity. The loss in terms of lives and assets, and deprivation and dislocation suffered by the people are enormous which effectively slows down the process of development. That being so, we have to bring in disaster mitigation into the process of development so as to make it sustainable. Mitigation has to be made multi-disciplinary spanning all sectors of development.

Since the Continent of Asia is extremely vulnerable to natural disasters, there is an imperative for concerted and organised efforts on a sustained basis on the part of the countries of the region to face the challenges posed by these disasters. Sharing of information and expertise, and pooling of resources, backed by appropriate legislation, will go a long way in reducing the intensity of natural calamities. A reliable, early warning system is essential to enable people to take appropriate and timely action for the safety of their lives and property. We have to further streamline our early warning systems so as to minimize the death and destruction caused by natural calamities like cyclones, floods, and earthquakes.

In this context, we greatly appreciate the proposal mooted by Bangladesh at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Malta in November 2005 for the establishment of a Commonwealth Natural Disaster Management Programme. We are indeed pleased that the Heads of Government welcomed the proposal, which would enable Member Countries to cooperate in capacity-building for disaster risk reduction and disaster response management. The CHOGM has accordingly requested the Commonwealth Secretary-General to develop a mechanism for establishing and operationalising the proposed initiative in consultation with Member States.

Taking into consideration the vulnerability of our country to natural calamities, we have set in place a National Disaster Framework at the Centre covering various aspects like institutional mechanisms, disaster prevention strategy, early warning system, disaster mitigation, preparedness and response and human resource development. We have identified and listed in the Framework areas of intervention and agencies to be involved at the National, State and District levels and this Framework has been shared with all our State Governments and Union Territory Administrations.

The change in the policy and approach to natural calamities has necessitated a shift to pre-disaster aspects of mitigation, prevention and preparedness. In keeping with this shift, new institutional mechanisms are being put in place. Recently, a new legislation establishing a National Disaster Management Authority, has been passed by the Parliament. Such Authorities are to come up at the State and District levels as well. There are provisions in the Act for the constitution of a National Institute of Disaster Management, the creation of a National Disaster Response Force, National Disaster Response Fund and National Disaster Mitigation Fund.

India whole-heartedly supports initiatives to facilitate regional cooperation in confronting the challenges posed by natural disasters and we are ever keen to share our expertise and experience in the field with our Asian neighbours.

The second subject we have before us, namely, 'Problems of Development facing Children and the Role of Parliamentarians' is of great importance to all of us. We all are aware that the children comprise the most vulnerable section of our society. Unfortunately, a large number of them are victims of disease, deprivation, malnutrition, hunger and lack of proper care and attention. They are the worst victims of poverty and environmental degradation. Lack of proper sanitation and clean drinking water increase their vulnerability manifold. Children suffer the most whenever we are struck by natural calamities. Infant and child mortality rate is very high in this part of the world. To be developed countries, we must see that our most important

asset, our children, our future generation, are taken full care and that they are provided with all attention and the facilities to develop.

We need to recognise the role that education plays in the development of children. An educated child is better equipped to understand his surroundings, his rights and his role in the family and society. Health care is yet another area that needs special attention. We must take all necessary measures to promote health, enhance pre-natal care and reduce infant, child and maternal mortality rate. Access to clean water and sanitation also need special attention.

Friends, the well-being of our children requires political initiative and action at the highest level. It is high time that we gave serious consideration to the issues involving the rights and privileges of children, their survival, growth and development. Children need special protection as they are the most vulnerable to exploitation. We must work jointly to put an end to female foeticide, and address the challenges of child labour. We also have to protect children from trafficking and sexual abuse and secure for them a better future. Investment in children's education, health and nutrition is truly the investment for national development.

We in India have taken several steps for the protection and development of our children. The National Charter for Children adopted in February 2004 emphasises our commitment to children's rights to survival, development and protection. It also stipulates the duties for the State and the community towards children. Forty-one per cent of India's population are below 18 years of age and we consider this segment of our population a national asset which needs to be nourished and developed. The National Plan of Action for Children, 2005, enjoins upon the Government to ensure all measures and an enabling environment for the survival, growth, development and protection of all children, so that each child can realize his or her inherent potential and grow up to be a healthy and productive citizen.

India is committed to giving her children opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy atmosphere with freedom and dignity, and to ensure that their constitutional and legal rights are protected. The Commission for Protection of Child Rights Bill when enacted will provide a National Commission and State Commissions for the protection of child rights. The Commission will have the power to look into complaints or take *suo motu* notice of the cases involving violation of constitutional and legal rights of children. It can also monitor implementation of laws and programmes relating to the survival, welfare and development of children. At the parliamentary level, we have constituted a Parliamentary Forum on Children to equip our members of Parliament with information and inputs on all issues concerning children.

As people's representatives, parliamentarians have a great responsibility to work for the welfare of our children. Individually, we can lead the people of the constituency we represent in solving problems affecting children, while collectively we can influence the Government to take proactive measures for children's welfare. Allocation of resources in the Budget is an indicator of a Government's commitment to a particular issue. Since the national Budget has to be passed in Parliament for allowing the Government to spend money, we, as parliamentarians, can play a major role in influencing the Government to make sufficient allocation in the Budget for the development of our children. There is also a need to review from time to time children-related laws and rules so as to make them contemporary and sensitive to children's needs and welfare. As law-makers, parliamentarians can make a substantial contribution to updating of children-related laws and bringing in of policies that prohibit children's exploitation.

Together, we need to work for the betterment of our children and take various measures on a priority basis to protect their childhood, promote their rights and help them realize their full potential. We need to work for providing an environment that is conducive to the mental and physical development of our children. Our future growth and development depend on what kind of facilities we provide to our children. Through mutual cooperation and exchange of expertise, I am sure, we can remove many of the causes responsible for the lot of our children.

Friends, it is now widely held that the 21st Century will be an Asian Century. If that were so, it is left to us to help make it a reality. This can only be achieved when we all strive together to confront the challenges before us. It is most appropriate that this Conference of Parliamentarians and Legislators from the Asia Region has chosen to debate two topical issues of utmost relevance to our people–confronting natural disasters and ensuring the welfare of our children. We need to pool our expertise and experience in both these areas, if we have to make the 21st Century really an Asian Century. I am sure that the deliberations at the Conference will be fruitful and meaningful and we would all be enriched, having shared each other's perspectives and experiences on matters which are of utmost relevance to our peoples.

Thank you.

INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY: A PARLIAMENTARY PERSPECTIVE*

I welcome you all to this Appreciation Course in Parliamentary Processes and Procedures, being organized by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST). Let me extend my heartiest congratulations to all of you on your selection for this prestigious Service. It gives you an opportunity to be part of the Foreign Service and serve the vital interests of our country in different capitals of the world and in various international organizations.

The Foreign Service provides a fascinating and challenging career. It calls for specialization and a sense of preparedness to safeguard national interests in a highly competitive international scenario. The Indian Foreign Service has performed this job in a highly professional manner. I hope you will make every effort to represent India in the most effective manner and, in this endeavour, adhere to the broad normative principles of our democracy, which invariably involve the supremacy of our Parliament.

Today, the dynamics of international relations have changed; so also have the dimensions of diplomacy. The process of globalization is altering the world all around us. There is widespread apprehension, especially in the developing world, that it has the capacity to dilute the sovereignty of nation States, both internally and externally, more particularly in economic matters. This concern is certainly not totally unfounded. How we respond to the changes is one of the many challenges of the emerging international order.

The task before international relations and diplomacy is to convert these challenges into opportunities for our people, without compromising our national interests. And that is where all of you have a very crucial role to play. There are a large number of issues that you will be expected to deal with as diplomats, namely international political economy, restructuring of the existing international financial and monetary architecture under the WTO regime, environmental and developmental issues as also the scourge of international terrorism.

You are well aware that our democratic system is based on the supremacy of Parliament. Article 51 of the Constitution enjoins the State to make

* At the inauguration of the Appreciation Course in Parliamentary Processes and Procedures for the Probationers of Indian Foreign Service, organized by the BPST, New Delhi (9 January 2006).

endeavours to promote international peace and security; maintain just and honourable relations between nations; foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another; and encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration. In fact, the Constitution vests in Parliament the inviolable power to legislate on all matters which brings the Union into relations with any foreign country.

Over the years, the Parliament has provided meaningful and purposive public scrutiny of foreign policy issues. The inputs provided by the Parliament, I am happy to say, have in many ways influenced our policies in all the major foreign policy issues. The latest manifestations of the enhanced parliamentary interest, as many of you might have noticed, can be seen in the volume of discussions and members' concerns reflected on the floor of the House on issues such as democratization of the United Nations, the nuclear issue and various matters related to the WTO, particularly those concerning the interests of our farmers, labour class, etc.

The Departmentally-Related Standing Committee on External Affairs has the mandate to oversee the functioning of the Ministry. The discussions in the Committee provide major inputs and insights while formulating long-term policies. The importance attached to the Committee is evident from the fact that two former Prime Ministers, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Shri I.K. Gujral, have headed it in the past.

The members of Parliament not only represent the people but also help mould public opinion on the issues of the times. It is in this context that inter-parliamentary cooperation assumes significance. We are a very active member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). These bodies provide parliamentarians opportunities to meet periodically to discuss common problems and exchange views on important parliamentary and other matters of global concern. One of our eminent parliamentarians and the Hon'ble Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, has recently been elected the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. His election to this august office is indeed a recognition of India's importance and pre-eminence in the CPA.

The Indian Parliamentary Group (IPG) which was created in pursuance of a motion adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 16 August 1948, acts as a vital link between various Parliaments of the world and helps to maintain a smooth exchange of Parliamentary Delegations, goodwill missions, etc. to encourage bilateral relations. Over the years, the IPG has constituted a number of Parliamentary Friendship Groups with foreign Parliaments. The basic aim of such Friendship Groups is to maintain political, social and cultural contacts

between countries and to assist in having exchanges of information and experience on issues relating to parliamentary and other important activities. It is here that parliamentary diplomacy has emerged as a key component of our foreign policy formulations.

In the context of the points that I have discussed, it is appropriate that the BPST has designed this Programme to acquaint you with the functional dynamics of our Parliament. As responsible officers of our foreign service, you will be our representatives in foreign lands. As such you will be representing our culture, our national values, and are expected to vigorously pursue the policy lines evolved by the Government and accepted by the Parliament. For all your commissions and omissions you are accountable to the Government and through it to our Parliament. This accountability is at the centre of our democratic existence. Wherever you may be in the years to come, always bear in mind that the national interest is paramount and conduct yourselves in a manner befitting the trust our country reposes in you. You should remember that you are representing an emerging global power and the world's largest democracy. I trust that you will discharge your duties and responsibilities in the most exemplary manner, bringing laurels to our country. My best wishes to all of you in all your endeavours.

With these words, I am pleased to inaugurate this Appreciation Course in Parliamentary Processes and Procedures and hope that all of you, in the years ahead, will hold our country's flag high in international relations.

Thank you.

TRENDS OF DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA*

It is indeed a matter of great honour for me to have been invited to deliver the First Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay Memorial Lecture on the theme, 'The Trends of Democracy in Contemporary India'. It is appropriate that the Teachers Association of this prestigious University of which late Prof. Hiren Mukherjee himself was an outstanding *alumnus* and a distinguished Faculty and Senate member, has instituted this Lecture in memory of one of the finest of democrats and a parliamentarian *non-pareil*. I feel humble that I have been asked to deliver this Lecture in memory of Prof. Mukherjee at my own *alma mater*.

This University, a Centre of Academic Excellence, has long played a vanguard role in India's social, literary, cultural and political firmament and has produced many outstanding leaders in different fields who contributed significantly to shaping today's India. Its contributions to the domain of knowledge and education, apart from politics, too are immeasurable. The University also had the honour of having been guided by Vice-Chancellors of eminence. It can legitimately take pride in having been associated with great names like, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Dr. Meghnad Saha and Dr. Amartya Sen, amongst others. The names are just illustrative and certainly not exhaustive. There have been a large number of Professors, Faculty members and the *alumni* who have contributed significantly towards teaching and research and earned laurels for the University at the national and international level.

Prof. Hiren Mukherjee was an outstanding parliamentarian, a brilliant orator, a prolific writer, a profound scholar and educationist, a sensitive social activist and an exceptionally fine human being – verily a versatile genius. It is but rare to find a person of such multi-faceted qualities and diverse achievements who dignified our public life for several decades. Till his very last breath, the 'Unrepentant Communist', as he chose to describe himself, lived an eventful life dedicated to all the causes dear to his heart – and he had all along demonstrated deep sensitivity and concern on every issue affecting our nation and our people. While we found him associated with the working class as a committed communist, at another level, there was a

* At the First Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay Memorial Lecture on *The Trends of Democracy in Contemporary India*, Kolkata (16 January 2006).

historian and an educationist in him engrossed in an in-depth study of manifold issues and at yet another level, he was one of the founders of the Progressive Writers' Association and the founder President of the Indian People's Theatre Association. To many, he was the 'Conscience of the Left'; to many others, he was a 'Cerebral Politician'. In his own inimitable style, he often described himself as 'the jack of all incompatible trades'.

Prof. Mukherjee was an intellectual par excellence. He did not conceptualise his ideas and ideals living in an ivory tower. He wanted to make politics a means to an end, the end being the freedom and liberty of the people and the establishment of an egalitarian society. He knew more than anybody else that the lot of the people can be changed only through the instruments of politics. That is why, perhaps, he chose to enter the tumultuous arena of electoral politics sacrificing the option of making a legal career or a teaching profession. The loss of the academic world and the legal profession turned out to be a great gain for the world of modern Indian politics, for, by entering the political arena, he truly elevated and exalted our political discourse.

Prof. Hiren Mukherjee left all those who came across him awe-struck, not merely with his intellectual acumen but also with his innate humane nature, concern for the poor and the vulnerable and his sensitivity to the travails of the needy and the underprivileged. And it was mainly through the institution of Parliament, of which he was a member for twenty-five long years, that he lent his forceful voice on the issues of the times.

Prof. Mukherjee was an ardent patriot who greatly cherished freedom and fundamental human rights. He was fully convinced that the freedom which we wrested from the British after a prolonged struggle could be concretised through the highest representative institution of the country. For him, Parliament symbolised the supreme and sovereign will of the people. And that is why he always strove to strengthen the institution of Parliament. He wrote in his unique style:

> Our freedom, of course, is a treasure; India is a big enough country with the talent and treasure of our own people and their spirit. Indian freedom has indeed been a historic landmark; the freedom of India has changed the climate of the globe, the freedom of other colonial peoples following in its wake. That freedom is not only symbolized but concretised in the work of the Parliament of our country. Parliament symbolises the sovereignty of our people and this sovereignty has been purchased by a long struggle – the people giving their blood and their treasure in the struggle for liberation.

Since the well-being of the common man was a cause close to Hiren Mukherjee's heart, he wanted Parliament to strive for the emancipation of the poor and the destitute. He also strongly felt that our legislators have to live up to the expectations of the people who sent them to the representative institutions. In his book, *India and Parliament*, he wrote:

> Parliaments are not an end in themselves, but means to an end, which can only be the happiness and the greatness of a people in so far as laws and government can help or hinder them. ... The way our people behaved on the unprecedented occasion (the first general election) was a classic testimony to their innate maturity of culture and of outlook. They wrote, then, a new bright page in parliamentary history. More important, they charged their deputies, with impressive dignity, to hurry to tasks of world-historic values, the building of a new and dynamic life on India's hoary soil.

For him, Parliament was the true representative of the people, changing its character in response to their moods and aspirations, a living, dynamic institution and not a static, inert one. He aptly described this in the following words: 'It is in the nature of Parliament not to be at rest but to be mobile – pulsating, heaving, seething ... altogether an unquie yet arresting phenomenon.' He held the Parliament of India at a very high pedestal and believed, 'If the British House of Commons is the finest club in the world, India's Lok Sabha, though different in many ways... is by no means a dull and drowsy conglomeration...'

Prof. Hiren Mukherjee was a member of Parliament at a time when parliamentary democracy was in its formative stage in the country. It was the time when several procedural innovations and initiatives were required to adapt Parliament to the changing political situations and the needs of the time. He had an abiding faith in parliamentary traditions and conventions and strengthened them through the dignity and grace typical of him. Though he accepted the importance of a certain standard of conduct and mutual relationship in Parliament, Hiren Mukherjee realised that at times conditions so emerged that uproarious scenes become inevitable in the House. However, the epitome of parliamentarism that Hiren Mukherjee was, he warned against such repeated occurrences, and said: 'Scenes in Parliament cannot be entirely avoided because, on occasion, tempers are so frayed that some letting-off of steam, human nature being what it is, cannot be totally impermissible. But repetition of scenes makes them stale, undignified, unpleasant and derogatory to the country as a whole.'

Prof. Hiren Mukherjee belonged to that group of parliamentarians who pursued politics not to gain anything but to give voice to genuine issues of the common man in the Chambers of our Legislatures. For him, the service

of the masses was the only aim and Parliament was the most important institution to serve that objective. Being an elected representative of the people itself was an honour to Hiren Mukherjee and he believed that every member should endeavour to safeguard the trust and faith reposed in him by his constituents. His long and illustrious innings in the political life of the country has left an indelible mark on its parliamentary history. The strong parliamentary institutions which India has been able to evolve over the years, owe a great deal to leaders like Hiren Mukherjee who symbolised its best traditions. As Shri Jyoti Basu described, he was truly a 'phenomenon in the realm of our parliamentary politics.' I pay my respectful homage to this great Indian, whom I always treated as one of those who personified the best in public life and as one of the greatest parliamentarians of all times.

India, in its long journey of democratic politics, has reached a defining moment in history. Our protracted freedom struggle and the ultimate attainment of Independence was a watershed not only in the history of India, but also in the history of the 20th Century as a whole, for it sounded the death-knell of colonialism and imperialism and heralded what we call the Afro-Asian resurgence. India's Independence was a resounding triumph of the spirit of nationalism and the urge for freedom and assertion of human dignity and liberty, the cherished goals of democracy.

As the nation started navigating in the unchartered waters of democracy, anxiety and apprehensions arose in some quarters with regard to the efficacy of our political system. The democratic parliamentary polity which we introduced in our country was not a clone of the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy as it wisely took into account our ethos, native realities and our unique social milieu. No wonder, therefore, that our democratic polity has withstood the test of time reasonably well, although we all agree that there is ample scope for improvement.

Today, when we discuss the trends of democracy in contemporary India, we are conscious that we are passing though a momentous phase in our history. Significant changes are taking place in almost all spheres of our national life. We are living in a society, where different generations have a fairly good and realistic understanding of the importance of and of the nature and potential of democracy in our country. Today, therefore, the people are demanding pro-active governance. They are demanding performance, decisive action, to address their concerns, not rhetoric or emotive slogans. They cannot be misled any longer with catchy but empty slogans. They are no longer hiding their impatience. They are now fully aware of the power of their franchise. They cannot be taken for granted. That, to my mind, is the most visible trend in our socio-political life today.

Our people, today, are identifying themselves totally with the system. Substantial sections of our population—I am not talking about those privileged ones in the portals of the Universities or in the corridors of power—our common people, are becoming increasingly aware of the potential of our democracy in realizing their dreams, their hopes and aspirations. They are aware that through effective intervention by the Government their plight can be improved; that if those in positions, discharge their duties honestly and sincerely people's problems could be addressed, that if there is commitment to the cause of the people, democracy is the best system of governance available.

In some ways it is this realization that has contributed to the emergence of a large number of political parties on the regional and national political horizon and the resultant coalition-era in our politics today. It is out of the people's perception that groups and interests closely identified with their other visible or recognised identities on the social front are better placed to address their concerns that many political parties have emerged in our country. I do not want to go into the merit or demerit of this situation. But the clear inference is that people express their disenchantment in different ways for the system's failure to deliver.

Today the Parliament is becoming more and more authentically representative of a wider cross-section of our society. The changing socio-economic profile of our Legislative Bodies is testimony to the emerging trend towards a genuinely inclusive democracy in our country. This widening of the concept of representation in all its manifestations, is yet another visible trend in Indian politics today. The elitist nature of politics is giving way to a more people-oriented one. One of the most significant steps taken by Independent India was the introduction of universal adult franchise without discrimination on any ground whatsoever. It is indeed worth recalling that Indian women were granted the right to vote even earlier than their counterparts in many other countries, including several countries in the Western world. This was undoubtedly a very significant step to enlist them as stakeholders in our democratic edifice and in their social and political empowerment.

The smooth and orderly transition of power from one regime to another is an eloquent testimony to the stabilisation of our democratic and parliamentary polity. By exercising their right to vote judiciously and effectively, the people have made it clear that they want accountability from their representatives and from the political parties and the Governments. This is indeed a very positive trend which augurs well for our democracy. Across the political spectrum, it is now increasingly recognized that accountability is at the core of good governance practices and the people are conscious of their right to know and of their right to development.

Democracy cannot be complete as also inclusive without the effective participation of women who constitute one-half of our population. While universal adult suffrage, as I said earlier, has enfranchised them, what is needed is to create conditions to enable them to participate in the democratic processes in a more purposive and dignified manner. It is in this context that legislation providing for reservation of seats in the primary representative institutions for women was introduced. By this, hundreds and thousands of women have entered public offices and gained access to political life. Today there is a growing realisation that empowerment of women cannot be achieved by ensuring their representation at the lower levels of our democratic institutions alone. To make it truly effective, we need to provide for their participation in the higher levels of representation. I do not believe that this genuine demand of women can be denied for long. A recognition of and commitment to the pivotal role of women in our political and decision-making processes, thus, is another positive trend in contemporary Indian democracy.

An offshoot of the broadening of the political base of our society and polity is the emergence of coalition politics. Although there had been instances of coalition politics in India even prior to Independence, only in recent decades has a coalition culture become a trend across the country. Most political parties seem to have learnt the art of reconciling divergent and incompatible interests in a manner that the mutually agreeable objectives of the coalition partners could be accomplished and, in some cases, supporting the governmental set up from outside, without compromising their stand on vital issues. What is important is to have a broad understanding on programmes and policies in the larger interests of the country. This approach, to my mind, is the point to be noted about the more than a quarter-century old coalition experiment in West Bengal which started under the leadership of Shri Jyoti Basu.

Without doubt, one of the key elements that has gone into the success of this experiment has been the vision, commitment and dynamism of Shri Jyoti Basu, who, as the leader of his party and as the leader of the Left Front, led the coalition on behalf of his party, in successive elections and provided effective leadership to the Government taking all other partners with him, for a quarter century, even when his own party had majority of its own to run the Government. The fact that Shri Jyoti Basu could do it was in tune with his party's decision to unify progressive forces to work together for the benefit of the common people.

The emergence of coalition politics and coalition Governments is a reflection of India's diversity and cultural and linguistic plurality and its acceptance as a viable system of governance is suggestive of the maturity of our parliamentary polity. Since coalition politics have more or less come to

stay, we should uphold the imperatives of coalition politics and Governments by developing institutional mechanisms and conventions for its success. Today, there is also a realisation among the academia and the intelligentsia that coalition politics reinforces our federal polity. Under coalition politics, the regional identities of the States have been further enhanced and their aspirations have been reflected more effectively and meaningfully. Coalition politics also enables the individual States to maintain their distinctiveness without compromising national unity and integrity. In this regard, the emergence of regional political parties has also been a trend which we have witnessed in the last two decades and more. Political pluralism has assumed a new dimension with regional political entities coming to the front. In a way, this process has led to the mainstreaming of our political system. Regional parties have now come to have their own space in the political set-up, not merely in their limited territorial spheres but also in national politics because of the prevalence of coalition governance.

Growing identification of the people with the system also has contributed to their demanding greater degree of probity and integrity in our public life and in the political profession. The perceived criminalisation of politics has vitiated our political system in a very regrettable manner. As such, the issue of probity in public life has assumed an added significance in our political system. While the malaise of corruption has always been a major issue in any polity, more so in a democratic polity like ours, what has brought the issue to the centre stage is the influence of money and muscle power in our electoral process and the resultant aberrations of politics. This is indeed a very dangerous trend which needs to be checked on a top priority basis. We need to cleanse our public life of the cancer of corruption. But this calls for proactive action by all sections of our society.

Recently, our Parliament took a very painful, yet forceful decision towards curbing the influence of corruption in our parliamentary set-up. While the media, the intelligentsia and a large section of our political spectrum, has welcomed the decision it has also raised some controversies. It is like a 'Catch 22' situation which is very aptly described by my learned friend and parliamentarian, Fali S. Nariman, thus: 'when Parliament does nothing, we complain, when Parliament does something, some of us also complain, but that is the cross that all political institutions are destined to bear'. If I go by the avalanche of public approval for the course our Parliament finally adopted, in its collective wisdom, we have to conclude that our people would not have been satisfied with anything less than that drastic action. Soon after the news Channel released the story, I received a letter from a concerned citizen seeking my permission for him to bang his head on the walls of the Parliament building. That showed the vehemence with which our people disapprove such behaviour by those in public life. It is in this context that I would

advocate the concept of 'right to recall' people's representatives as a deterrent and corrective mechanism against the aberrations in our public life.

It augurs well that now there is a greater degree of public awareness about the danger corruption poses to our democratic system and increasingly people are being vocal about the need to cleanse our public life of corruption and of bringing in greater degree of transparency in the processes of governance. This is also reflected in our Parliament's action of passing the Right to Information Act. I am sure, this Act is going to provide a further momentum to the strengthening of parliamentary democracy in our country. Today, the Parliament is demonstrating a greater degree of sensitivity to the problems of the farmers, of the working class, of the tribal and other disadvantaged sections of our people. This together with several other major parliamentary initiatives, like the passage of the Children's Right Protection Act, the Employment Guarantee Scheme Act, Domestic Violence against Women Act, etc. also speak not only of the growing concern of our Parliament to the vital social issues of our time, but also of its increasing relevance in our democratic set up.

The basic postulate of parliamentary democracy is Executive accountability to the people through the Legislature and the principle of separation of powers among the different organs of State, *viz.* the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary, and the harmonious relationship among them. It is of the utmost importance that any organ, to the detriment of the others, does not transgress the constitutional mandate functionally or territorially. It is out this conviction that I as the Speaker, Lok Sabha had to intervene in the Jharkhand episode as it was felt that the well-recognised contours of legislative space were being sought to be intruded into by another organ. Allowing such intrusions would undermine the delicate constitutional balance to the detriment of the whole system. A growing recognition of this crucial concept is another trend which is visible in our democracy today.

After more than half-a-century of parliamentary democracy, we may say that the teething troubles of the nascent democracy are over. What we are witnessing today is what the former President, Shri K.R. Narayanan described as the 'measles of the middle age'.

As I said earlier, Prof. Mukherjee set high score for discipline and decorum in our legislative bodies. This is one aspect which all of us in the representative institutions are always expected to keep in mind. I agree that there is growing cynicism and even anger among the people at some of the disorderly scenes and forced adjournments which mar our parliamentary proceedings. All of us in Parliament are concerned about it and we are constantly endeavouring to secure discipline and decorum. In this regard, another positive trend in

our parliamentary politics today is the increasing recognition of all concerned to make the functioning of our legislative bodies more transparent and to take these institutions nearer to the people. Our Parliament and other institutions also have several positive sides too to be highlighted before the public. The telecasting of parliamentary proceedings is an important step in this context. I am confident that out of this will emerge a more proactive citizen-Parliament interface in our country. It is hoped that one day our people will begin to feel proud of our democracy and its institutions at different levels. I am quite optimistic that it will not be long before we achieve that objective.

That image building is the collective responsibility of all stake-holders in our democracy, the political parties, the institutions of Government, the Opposition, the media and the people at large. I believe that a vigilant Opposition is an asset in a parliamentary democracy. While the Treasury Bench has the mandate to rule, the Opposition has to keep an unremitting vigil on the acts of omission and commission of the Government. Constructive criticism backed by viable alternative approaches, will definitely help democracy deliver better.

One of the most discerning trends of democracy in contemporary India is the increasingly important role of the media. Alongwith the social and political empowerment of the marginalised strata of the society, there has also been increasing political awareness among the citizenry. Major credit for this goes to a vibrant media. There is a very intimate relationship between the citizen, the media and the political process as a whole. With the proliferation of satellite TV channels and multiplicity of newspapers and magazines, the relationship between these three stakeholders have been made more interactive.

In this context, it is imperative for the media to function with greater social responsibility contributing positively towards enhancing and facilitating parliamentary democracy in the larger interest of the people and of the nation. They should also write proactively about the many positives of our parliamentary democratic system and not restrict themselves only to criticism of the political processes and those in public life. Of course, the media should report freely and fearlessly about the omissions and commissions of those in positions of authority. But at the same time, they should also help create conditions conducive for the flourishing of democracy in the country. No one should cause to let cynicism pervade the minds of the people *vis-à-vis* our democratic experiments.

Our people's preference for value-based politics is yet another discernible trend in our contemporary politics which no one should lose sight of. They have time and again decisively rejected divisive politics in the country.

It is, therefore, a bounden duty for all right-thinking people to channelise our people's energy, particularly of our younger generation, constructively and not to do anything to subserve the narrow sectarian and divisive interests. It is expected of everyone to be sensitive to the people's preferences rather than trying to provide backdoor legitimacy to narrow politics of any kind.

Friends, when we look back on the more than five decades of parliamentary democracy in the country, we can discern several important trends besides the ones I have already referred to. Today, we take great pride in asserting ourselves as the largest democracy in the world and this is as it should be. But, we have to introspect about the quality of democracy that we have achieved and see to what extent have democracy facilitated development in the country. All of us realize that we still have a very long way to go in achieving our developmental potential.

Even after 58 years of freedom, India still lives in different centuries. On the one hand is the India of the affluent, of those who have had the benefit of modern education and are intellectually and materially empowered and on the other is the India of those who live under conditions of poverty, deprivations, squalor, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices.

We have not yet achieved the desired result of the full empowerment of the socially backward sections. Caste-based social stratification is a reality we still have to reckon with. Similarly, gender-based discrimination is yet another major social issue we have to address. The women who constitute almost 50 per cent of our population are yet to have an effective share in the major political decision-making processes, especially in our representative institutions. Large-scale unemployment is another serious issue we have to grapple with. The working class, which is contributing significantly to the building of modern India, is not receiving its due recognition from the system as a whole. More than one third of our citizens are yet to be extended the benefit of basic education. Only 6 per cent of the University education age-group are actually taking the benefit of higher education in the country today. A sizeable section of our population still do not have access to safe drinking water and dependable energy supply. The benefits of modern medicine and the developments in the field of science, information and communications technologies have not reached many parts of our country yet. Nearly 350 million of our citizens continue to live below the poverty line.

If we consistently fail in keeping the promises to the people, they will lose faith in democracy as a viable system capable of addressing their concerns. Those who have been left out of the developmental track of the past nearly six decades of freedom are today demanding to be taken into account. Today they are aware that they can punish those who fail to deliver, at the appropriate

time. To my mind in our post-independence phase, perhaps there was no other period when this realisation of the people came into sharp political focus as it is happening today.

People want the Governments to work for ensuring, health for all, education for all, home for all, jobs for all and security for all. This is the expected end results of democracy. Democracy is also about good-governance. The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. Today our people desire the establishment of a socio-political order in which no discrimination takes place on the basis of religion, race, caste, creed or sex and where all citizens enjoy equal opportunities and at least an acceptable minimum quality of living. The real substance of democracy has to be assessed in terms of the impact it makes on the quality of living of the people. The new economic forces, unless monitored with a caring eye for the vulnerable sections of our society and with a human face, as it is referred to, has the potential to further impoverish the poor. Therefore, while applying new strategies for development, the social dimensions should receive adequate attention.

In an increasingly globalized world, we have to safeguard the interests of our people in diverse sectors. On the social plane, we have to constantly strive to consolidate our secular fabric and plural society. There is an increasing awareness of the socio-political and economic ills afflicting our nation and the ways and means to confront them. This is definitely having a positive impact on the content and quality of political discourse in our country, and, in turn, on our contemporary democracy. In this context, I would make a special mention of the role of education in strengthening democracy. In an increasingly knowledge-driven world, education has an important influence on the socio-economic transformation of a country. Universalisation of education should not remain mere rhetoric. The right to education which we have now constitutionally ordained should be made a reality. Or, as Prof. Amartya Sen rightly cautioned, 'if we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure.' An informed electorate will, needless to say, lead to a more informed democracy. I hope Centres of Academic Excellence like the Calcutta University will rise to the occasion and provide a new vision and direction to the nation in the years ahead.

We need to develop a healthier political culture and change the prevailing image of intrigues, venality, disorder, anarchy, fraud, corruption and dishonesty associated with politics and democratic life in the country if we have to sustain people's faith in democracy. Once people lose faith in the system, no force, no army, can help save the system.

Democratic institution-building is a continuous process which needs to be sustained by all stake-holders in a polity—its people, its leaders, its institutions. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said, 'Democracy is not a static thing, it is an everlasting march.' The leaders have the most crucial role in it. They are expected to be role-models for the people. But if in people's perception, *politicians are a bunch of greedy,* criminal, *anarchic, intriguing* lot, what respect people will have for democracy which will be perceived as a system producing such elements. Such situation can only help in creating more space for non-democratic forces to emerge in the country and thereby contribute towards undermining the system itself.

Placing the importance of constructive political mobilization in a democracy in proper perspective, Dr. Harish Khare a distinguished journalist, poignantly observed:

> If the rhythm of the polity seems to be set by investigator-entrepreneurs, it is because our self-righteous leaders have countenanced a mood of suspicion, accusation, distrust, and doubt. There can be no gainers in this game that no leader or party can hope to control fully to its advantage. Unless this trend is bucked, the polity will stand denuded of its democratic legitimacy.

It is expected of all those associated with the institutions of democracy, at every level and of all organs, not to indulge in anything that could cause to undermine the credibility of our system. This is what our people expect of all of us. The negative public perception of politics and of those in public life should not be permitted to cloud the minds of the younger generations. Rather, they should be made to recognize that it is our collective and common responsibility to evolve ways and means to perfect our system of governance, rather than finding fault with it and running away from their responsibilities towards it.

We all need to bear in mind that our Parliament is not only the highest people's institution but the best forum in a democracy through which socio-economic and political transformation can be brought about in our country. Therefore, what is required is more and more committed, well-meaning people, positively and progressively disposed towards people's problems coming to occupy the political space in the country. This process has to start with our youth who are our future. They should realise that if they do not come forward to shoulder their responsibilities towards democracy actively, they will be only passive witnesses to the process of the gradual undermining of the best system of governance thoughtfully bequeathed to them by our Founding Fathers. Parliament, rather than to be looked down upon, should be relied on as offering the best avenue for public service and for contributing

to the process of taking our great country to its destined role in the world. Ultimately, the people are the best sentinels of democracy.

If we are in a position to claim that democracy has come of age in our country, that it is here to stay, the major part of the credit for it goes to our people. They are the ones who have shown to the world their unquestionable capability and commitment to work a democratic system in the country. They are the ones, who have brought about changes in the Government, with enormous sense of responsibility and uncanny wisdom, 6 out of 14 times that we went through the General Elections in the country— in most cases proving the political pundits, and astrologers wrong.

Our people demonstrate such extra-ordinary sense of responsibility and discretion in exercising their franchise. They expect of those in the arena of politics to be responsible, to be accountable and to be transparent in their functioning. They expect of the leaderships to provide stable Governments, to pursue larger national values, as opposed to narrow partisan agenda. They expect of those in power to perform well, keeping the larger national interest and the interest of the common people in mind. We have seen, in the past that whenever the people perceived political action bordering on irresponsibility, sometimes resulting in political instability, they have punished those responsible, whenever they perceived popular mandate being misused to undermine democracy from within, at the earliest opportunity they had, the people exercised their judgment to safeguard the basic structure of our Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic. What comes out of their conduct is a greater degree of maturity, prudence and responsibility than what our institutions and their leaders demonstrate habitually. These are all the achievements of the common citizens in working our democracy. What they demand of the political leadership, quite justifiably, is responsible behaviour, using power as an instrument to effectively serve the people.

I am reminded of an incident during the French Revolution, when one of the prominent leaders, seeing from a house top a procession of agitated masses moving towards the Palace, had to run after them and join them to save his leadership. If the leaders do not lead on proper directions, the masses will take on to themselves this task. That is the inherent strength of democracy.

Prof. Hiren Mukherjee used to constantly remind us of the importance of principled politics in the country and of the need to sustain people's faith in the system. As a member of the Lok Sabha for twenty-five years, he enlivened its debates with informed orations, strengthened the parliamentary institutions with the best use of its rules and procedures and enriched our parliamentary democracy through his unwavering faith in and steadfast commitment to its

principles and philosophical underpinnings. As he very prophetically stated in his book, *'India and Parliament'*:

> Our penchant for Parliament, however, is more than a hang-over from British times. ... Certain forms and practices, needless to say, will change, but the basic parliamentary idea, if all goes well, deserves to stay. Since the world is so situated today that without the shake-up, somewhat catastrophic but nonetheless cleansing, of revolution, big changes can and are, likely to take place, Parliament in India can look forward to a fair lease of life. The task is to see that its pitch is not queered and trials and tribulations that are excessively irksome can be avoided.

Throughout the five terms of his membership in Parliament, this outstanding parliamentarian helped in the evolution of the highest of parliamentary traditions and conventions in our country. His straightforwardness, dedication, commitment and respect for parliamentary institutions is worthy of emulation by the parliamentary fraternity everywhere. Prof. Hiren Mukherjee is, indubitably, a role-model for the parliamentarians of today and tomorrow.

In one of his expostulations, Prof. Hiren Mukherjee once spoke thus: 'Politics, fundamentally speaking, calls for passion. And passion, in Latin and the Roman languages, has for its first as meaning 'suffering' which none in true political life should wish to escape.' Prof. Mukherjee bore this passion and suffering in ample measure, all through his long innings in public life. The need of India today is such passion for politics, permeated by a willingness to bear any suffering for the cause of the nation and parliamentary democracy which we swear by. That would perhaps be the best tribute to Indian democracy and one of its finest products, Prof. Hirendranath Mukherjee. With these words, I once again thank you all for extending me the honour of addressing this distinguished gathering on a theme close to the heart of a legend of our times, and crucial for the sustenance and survival of our nation.

Thank you.

CHALLENGES BEFORE INDIAN DEMOCRACY*

It is a matter of great privilege for me to have been invited to deliver the first lecture in the University Lecture Series introduced by the Delhi University. Being in the corridors of the University in itself is a great learning experience. I feel humble to be able to speak to such a distinguished gathering of academicians and students of this prestigious University this evening, on 'Challenges before Indian Democracy', a topic of great contemporary relevance.

In the field of higher education in diverse disciplines, the University of Delhi has rightly attained great eminence. From its small beginning in 1922, with only three Colleges, two Faculties and about 750 students, the University has, over the years, expanded substantially in its academic endeavours. I am sure, under the leadership of your distinguished Vice-Chancellor supported by your pool of outstanding Faculty members, the University will scale new heights of glory and continue to serve the student community, known for its activism, social and political awareness and creativity. Many distinguished *alumni* of the University have enriched our nation's life in diverse fields by their varied contributions and, I am sure, you will carry forward that tradition in the years ahead.

Today being the International Women's Day, I wish to begin my address by conveying my greetings to the women of our country, particularly to those who are associated with this University, for all their achievements and reiterating our commitment to be associated with their struggle. I hope the formal observances of the Day will contribute meaningfully in empowering the women of our country, along with those of other countries, who are yet to receive their entitlements and rights as citizens.

To my mind, the greatest challenge before our Founding Fathers, in the wake of freedom, was to come up with a viable system of Government that would reflect and represent the diversities of India and ensure good governance, at the same time instilling a sense of dignity and participation in our people, who had come out of bondage and humiliation, after centuries of subjugation. We finally adopted the system of parliamentary democracy, after purposive and elaborate debate, with the conviction that it best suited our ethos and culture and the specific needs of our nation. In spite of the fact

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that the world around us was quite sceptical about our ability to successfully operate a democratic system, we can take legitimate pride in the fact that in laying the institutional foundations of our Republic we have made remarkable progress.

Our most significant achievement of the first half century of freedom, to my mind, is that we have sustained a constitutional set-up, based on people's participation. Having come through Fourteen General Elections and experienced a good degree of political stability for over five and half decades, no one today will dispute that Indian democracy has come of age and that democracy is here to stay. This democratic consolidation, preserving and protecting the unity of such a heterogeneous country with one billion plus people, practising different religions, speaking different languages, and following different cultural and social choices, has indeed been a gigantic challenge that post-independent India has met substantially, for which, as a nation, we can legitimately take credit. To my mind, the institution that has contributed greatly to the consolidation and strengthening of democracy in the country is our Parliament. Over the years, our Parliament appropriately has come to be identified, both in theory and in practice, to be the pivot of our political system.

From the social perspective, Independent India had to undertake the delicate and challenging task of having to blend tradition with modernity, customs with the laws, to bring reason to prevail over superstitions and reconcile issues of faith with the demands of modern administration and governance. Perhaps the biggest and the most complex issue that India had to address, on the social front, was the issue of the political, social and economic exclusion of a significant segment of our population and the need for their empowerment by bringing them into our national mainstream. These seemingly impossible tasks, precipitated by historical forces, were sought to be achieved by taking recourse to progressive legislation and by adopting a policy of protective discrimination. Today, we are distinctly recognized in the world community for our democratic and secular values and for establishing the foundations for an inclusive and modern social order, in spite of several imperfections.

Democracy is not all about periodic elections and political rights alone but is fundamentally about providing for the basic needs of the people. This can be achieved only when the power structure is adequately representative of all sections of the society. Prof. Amartya Sen, has very perceptively analysed that democracy's claim to be valuable 'does not rest on just one particular merit'. He has stressed, 'There is a plurality of virtues here, including, first, the *intrinsic* importance of political participation and freedom in human life; second, the *instrumental* importance of political incentives in keeping

Governments responsible and accountable; and third, the *constructive* role of democracy in the formation of values and in the understanding of needs, rights and duties'.

The greatest challenge before our democracy today is about how we make it relevant for the common man. A representative democracy should work for the achievement of socio-economic and political justice for the common man, for the eradication of poverty, for putting an end to the exploitation of the disadvantaged sections of society and for providing the basic needs of the people. Mahatma Gandhi's notion of democracy contemplates that the weakest would have the same opportunity as the strongest.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar emphasised that democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness resulting in the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged. Therefore the fruits of development should be enjoyed by one and all equally and human dignity should remain inviolate under all circumstances. For this people have to be freed from discriminations based on race, ethnicity, class or gender. The problems of unemployment and under-employment are breeding other social evils and contributing to major tensions in different parts of the country today. The working class, which is contributing significantly to the building of modern India, is not receiving its due recognition from the system as a whole. More than one-third of our citizens are yet to be extended the benefit of basic education. Only about 6 per cent of the University education age-group, is actually taking the benefit of higher education in the country today. Nearly half a million of our villages are still without access to safe drinking water and dependable energy supply. The benefits of modern medicine and the developments in the field of science, information and communications technologies have not reached a substantial section of our people yet. Nearly 300 million of our citizens continue to live below the poverty line. Socio-economic development is bypassing a significant segment of our population today. Absence of a credible social security system makes life uncertain even for those enjoying at least minimum quality of living today. Thus, it is essential that all institutions of governance, be it the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary, should be sensitive to the hopes aspirations and frustrations of the people and discharge their duties effectively and promptly. We cannot hold distributive justice as a distant dream any more. As such, basic issues such as, food, shelter, clothing, unemployment, health care, etc., should occupy the centre stage in our national discourses transcending partisan politics.

Politics of confrontation and of intolerance that prevails in the country today will have to give way to one of reconciliation and accommodation so far as issues of national importance are concerned. Our political life in general

and the functioning of our representative institutions are being increasingly vitiated by acutely partisan attitudes getting deeply entrenched in our system at different levels. A polity fractured on religious, caste, regional and linguistic basis will greatly weaken our democratic structure and stifle the country's progress.

With over a billion population, of which nearly half constitute women, the question of empowerment of women is of very special significance. This is a major challenge before our democracy today which needs to be addressed urgently. The country has to put an end to gender bias, outdated values and societal attitudes that inhibit women's effective participation in public affairs and should endeavour to empower women socially, economically and educationally. It is to be done not as a charity but recognising it as part of the fundamental rights of women and as their entitlements as citizens in a democracy, in the evolution of which their contribution has been in no small measure.

Another important challenge before our democracy today is that of improving the effectiveness of our justice delivery system. An independent Judiciary has been accorded an important role in our constitutional set-up to protect the rights and interest of the citizens. No doubt, our Judiciary has been playing its constitutional role in preserving, protecting and promoting Fundamental Rights of the citizens, in many cases checking administrative lapses and curbing executive excesses, yet the growing inadequacies of the system, the mounting arrears of cases and slow moving judicial process, apart from charges of corruption, in many instances, results in denial of justice itself to the common man.

Between the districts and the subordinate courts and the High Courts in the country, there are over 23 million pending cases today, with a large number of them pending for periods ranging from 5 to 20 years. If you add the figures with the various specialised agencies and the Tribunals, the figure becomes further alarming. Delays and the high cost of litigation for those who cannot afford it, sends a clear message that the best legal services are available only to the affluent and due access to the doors of justice is denied to the poor and the socially disadvantaged, thus undermining such sections' faith in the institutions of our democracy. To quote one of the most outstanding jurists of our country, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer:

> The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, the bonded labourer, the pavement dweller, the damsel in distress, the sweated worker, the starving child, the dalit, the tribal and the socio-economic pariah shall have a vested interest in the Republic, only if the Constitution has a vested interest in their survival, their human worth and personhood.

There are many aberrations, which have crept into the system at different levels, more out of an incorrectly perceived role of the Judiciary in a democratic set up administered by a parliamentary system of governance, where the Executive, for all its administrative actions, is responsible to the elected bodies. As an eminent jurist commented, we suffer from a 'tendency to judicialise' everything that goes wrong in our system. It is inevitable that 'so long as the court views itself as being ultimately responsible for governing all aspects of our society, it will, understandably, be overworked'.

In the past nearly six decades of freedom, nothing much has been seen to have achieved to reach justice to the common people, for reducing the costs of litigation and to minimize the difficulty of access to the courts for those living in the rural areas and far-flung places. How many people can afford to approach the Supreme Court situated in the Capital city—far-far away from the reach of the common people, who have no possibility to have access here. But who are concerned for them? Even the vacancies among the judges are not filled in time. The perversions in our criminal justice system are a matter of grave concern and there is a growing feeling among the people that dispensation of justice can be easily manipulated by the muscle and money power.

The Judiciary, one of the three main pillars of our democratic governance, therefore, has to accept the challenge and demonstrate a greater degree of activism in discharging its primary responsibility of providing speedy and inexpensive justice and operate in a manner clearly recognizing the space provided to the other institutions of democratic governance. The principle of 'Separation of Powers', clearly provided for in our Constitution is not an optional feature to be selectively recognized by each organ of our Government, but is one of the basic features of our Constitution which has to pervade every aspect of administration in the country, otherwise, the credibility of our other vital democratic institutions will be suspect as allegedly impotent or irrelevant for our system. Ideally the responsibility for managing public affairs should be well left to those on whom Constitution has imposed the obligation and for which, in the ultimate analysis, they are accountable to the people.

Another aspect of governance, which warrants corrective intervention is the system of our public administration. Red-tapism and corrupt practices have been a bane of our public administration. A competent, accountable and dedicated bureaucracy, well-trained in the art and science of administration and functioning transparently and with probity is a necessary pre-requisite for bringing about a people-oriented democratic structure.

Bringing about integrity in our public life and in the political profession is an important issue before our country today. The perceived criminalisation

of politics has vitiated our political system in a very regrettable manner. While the malaise of corruption has always been a major issue in any polity, more so in a democratic polity like ours, what has brought the issue to the centre stage is the influence of money and muscle power in our electoral process and the resultant aberrations of politics. Degeneration of the electoral system, as a result of the illegal and immoral practices used for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity and contributing to the growing political apathy among the people. We need to seriously ponder over and address the issue of corruption, criminalisation and the communalisation of politics, the vicious role played by money and muscle powers, inadequate representation of women and, more significantly, the declining voter participation in the polls. The political parties and other stakeholders should come together to evolve a consensus on the ways and means to address this serious issue before our polity today.

I must add here that our Parliament itself has to be ever vigilant of the growing cynicism among our people about the way the institutions of our democracy function. It is on Parliament, more than on any other organ, that the responsibility for sustaining people's faith in democracy as the most sensitive system to the people's problems, rests. Therefore, the institution collectively and the individual members, who constitute it, will have to function as role models for the society at large. As the Presiding Officer of the House of the People, I am acutely aware of this great responsibility.

Our people are, justifiably, getting impatient with the way our democratic institutions are functioning today. Debates and discussion, the hallmarks of democracy, are being over-shadowed by disruption, confrontation and other non-democratic alternatives. The frequent disorderly scenes and forced adjournments do not serve our democracy better than reasoned debates and articulation of people's problems on the floor of the chambers. All of us in Parliament need to be concerned about it and endeavour to restore true democratic culture into the functioning of these institutions. Intolerance and denial of rights of others are antithetical to democracy.

Recently, our Parliament took a very painful, yet significant decision towards curbing the influence of corruption in our body politic. The media, the intelligentsia and a large section of our political spectrum, have welcomed the decision though it has also raised some avoidable controversies. If I go by the avalanche of public approval for the course our Parliament finally adopted in its collective wisdom, we have to conclude that our people would not have been satisfied with anything less than that drastic action. Soon after the news Channel released the story, I received a letter from one of our concerned citizens seeking my permission for him to bang his head, in disgust, on the walls of the Parliament building. That showed the vehemence with which our people disapprove of such behaviour by those in public life.

We need to correct the prevailing image of disorder, corruption and dishonesty associated with politics and democratic life in the country to sustain people's faith in democracy. We should highlight the positive sides of our Parliament and other institutions. The telecasting of parliamentary proceedings is an important step in this context resulting in a more proactive citizen-Parliament interface in our country.

Ultimately, image correction is the collective responsibility of all stake-holders in our democracy, the political Parties, the institutions of Government, the Opposition, the media and the people at large. A vigilant Opposition is an asset in a parliamentary democracy. While the Treasury Bench has the mandate to rule, the Opposition has to keep an unremitting vigil on the acts of omission and commission of the Government. Constructive criticism backed by viable alternative approaches, will definitely help democracy deliver better.

Democratic societies are expected to be open and transparent. We had recognized long back that the right to information was implicit in the right to freedom of speech as enshrined in the Fundamental Rights in our Constitution. The Right to Information, now statutorily recognized, should become a tool of grass-root empowerment, which would also work against corruption and exploitation. As it is said, it is in secret places that corruption thrives.

One of the most discerning trends of democracy in contemporary India is the increasingly important role of the media. It is imperative for the media to function with great social responsibility, contributing positively towards enhancing the credibility of our democratic exercises and in a manner facilitating parliamentary democracy in the larger interest of the nation. They are expected to maintain a proper balance in reporting Parliament to the people, rather than restricting themselves only to criticism of the political processes and those in public life. Of course, the freedom of Press is a Fundamental Right under the Constitution of India and it is expected that the media should report freely and fearlessly about the omissions and commissions of those in responsible positions. Unfortunately partisan politics is also influencing the media reporting and the dividing line between news and views is fast getting blurred. However, it will serve us well to remember that only in a democracy a free media thrives. Therefore, it should be seen that cynicism does not pervade the minds of the people *vis-à-vis* our democratic experiments.

Another great challenge before us is to see that secular politics is strengthened in our country and religious feeling do not dictate our political activities. Secularism is not a luxury to be tolerated by the political class selectively, but is an essential quality to be promoted by the Indian State, if

our national unity and integrity are to be sustained. Intolerance, negativism, hatred and violence that have been generated in the country in the name of narrow, parochial, sectarian, religious and other divisive issues have greatly vitiated the political atmosphere in the country and have inhibited our development. Therefore, we need to constantly highlight issues which unite the nation than which divide it.

As it is said, it is in the hearts and minds of men and women that fundamentalist ideas are generated and therefore it is there that defences against such narrow ideas are to be built. This is where a modern and progressive education becomes relevant. Educational institutions, rather than wasting their energies for confusing faith with history and mythology with science, should look forward and focus their endeavours on nation-building activities, drawing from the gains of developments in modern science and technology. The primary social agenda of education is the development of our human resource in a manner which will meet with the larger national requirements. Education is essentially about rational enquiry. An educated and informed citizenry, I believe, is the greatest asset of a democracy. Ultimately, only through a progressive and forward-looking courses of study, with emphasis on scientific subjects can we succeed in pulling down the walls that divide our people from one another and bring about an India truly integrated. To quote Gurudev Tagore: 'The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.' Our collective endeavour should be the establishment of an inclusive and modern social order, where the State should fight against the socially dangerous and outdated customs, superstitions and traditions and endeavour to bring social harmony and socio-political and economic stability for the people.

Unfortunately, today there is a wide gap between the educational opportunities available to the rich, educated and urban-centred people and the poor illiterate or semi-literate, rural and other disadvantageously placed. One of the principal reasons for the various initiatives for socio-economic development bypassing a significant segment of our population today is the lack of access to a quality education relevant to their requirements. Therefore, achieving universal education, laying special stress on vocational education and on the education of the girl child is an important challenge before the nation today. To quote Prof. Amartya Sen again, 'if we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure... Not to be able to read or write or count or communicate is a tremendous deprivation...'

The quality of research in our country today leaves much to be desired. If we have to improve the content of our education and produce world-class

scholars we need to lay greater stress on quality research. We should constantly review the importance of research in our education curriculum and make research and development the barometer of the country's progress.

Transforming our huge human resources into an asset is one of the greatest developmental requirements we have before us today. India has enormous unexploited potential as a 'knowledge hub' for the world. In fact, the rest of the world recognizes this distinct advantage that we have, which can give a great momentum to our economic development. For this, the most important prerequisite is an emphasis on quality education.

One of the most serious challenges facing the nation today is the problem of growing unemployment both in the rural and the urban sectors. The problem, while creating imbalance in our society, is also depriving the country of the use of our own human resource, for our development. It is not only that the country is losing the benefit of the services of those on whom huge investments have been made by the society, the situation is also giving rise to frustration, particularly among the educated and the youth and contributing to the emergence of various fissiparous tendencies and social and political tensions. It is also contributing to the weakening of a sense of involvement and motivation among the unemployed youth in nation-building activities. It is, therefore, essential for the economy to create the right kind of opportunities to absorb our manpower effectively. It should be the commitment of all to see that the new initiatives for economic development, whether it be by the Government or the corporate sector, and the endeavours of our institutions of learning, result in generating more and more employment opportunities. It is a matter of sadness that many brilliant men and women, who are assets of our country have chosen to go abroad and serve elsewhere whereby a developing country like ours is deprived of their participation in our pursuits of excellence.

Today our people desire the establishment of a socio-political order where no discrimination takes place on the basis of religion, race, caste, creed or sex and where all citizens enjoy equal opportunities and at least an acceptable minimum quality of living. The new economic forces, unless monitored with a caring eye for the vulnerable sections of our society and with a human face, has the potential to further impoverish the poor. It is, therefore, a crucial challenge before us to ensure that while applying new strategies for development, the social dimensions receive adequate attention.

We need to recognize the fact that India lives in her villages. Long term development of the country cannot be achieved without addressing the concerns of the rural sector, particularly the agricultural sector which constitute the backbone of our economy. City-centric developments will not help in

emancipating the substantial majority of our people, who live in our villages and who have not been effectively touched by the developmental initiatives of the past.

The greatest challenge before our democracy today, therefore, to my mind, is that of ensuring the full empowerment of all sections of our people. This would involve ensuring health for all, education for all, home for all, jobs for all and security for all. This is the expected end result of democracy, which can be achieved only when the power structure is adequately representative of all sections of the society. The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms.

A socially, economically and politically empowered India will be scientifically and technologically advanced and industrially developed. It will be effectively decentralised and consist of self-sufficient villages. It will be an India in which your social status will be decided not by your standing in the caste hierarchy but exclusively by your worth as an individual and as a citizen of this great country. It will be free from the scourges of communalism, poverty, illiteracy, exploitation and unemployment and free from the feudal hangover, and will provide plenty of choices for the fuller development of our human potential and ensure a dignified existence for all our citizens.

Challenges before our democracy are the challenges for our citizens, particularly the youth, to accept. The nation is looking up to the youth to take on those challenges. As I said earlier, only about six per cent of our university-eligible youth have the real opportunity to avail the benefit of higher education in the country. This will tell my young friends here how privileged they are as compared to the other 94 per cent of our youth. Among them also could have been found several potential success stories in life—as scientists, doctors, engineers, social scientists, corporate executives, media professional and what not. Our society is not yet ready to meet the challenge of providing the right opportunity to all of them and thereby exploit the full potential of their contributions to our nation-building.

All of us, particularly the students of this prestigious University, along with those of other institutions, should ask ourselves: Are we doing our best to contribute to the gigantic task of nation-building ? Have we not got a debt to repay to the society which has made sacrifices for our benefit ? An affirmative answer will ensure strengthening our march towards unity as well as prosperity. Everyone finds some fault with our democracy's functioning and expects of someone else to apply the correctives. But unless and until every section of our society takes onto itself this important task, our democratic functioning will not improve. Fault-finding and leaders-bashing and giving

gratuitous advice are hobbies indulged in by everyone—the judiciary, the academia, the media and the rest of the civil society. But how many come forward to provide better leadership or to shoulder the responsibilities of democratic functioning or to suggest a better alternative to democracy?

Politics is a factor which encompasses everyone's life, whether one is conscious of it or not. That being so, the question we should ask ourselves is, should we always be the beneficiaries of the system or should we not contribute to transform the quality of life in the country and to make a positive impact on the socio-economic fortunes of the people. Attracting the right talents – the honest, well-meaning, public-spirited and educated youth – into the arena of politics and public life is an important challenge before our democracy today. Analysing the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire the great thinker Gibbon said:

> When the people of Rome wanted not to give to society, but for society to give them, when the freedom they wished foremost was a freedom from responsibility, then it was that Rome ceased to be free.

I hope you all will not flinch away from the challenges before our democracy today and will participate in accelerating the process of development of the country as a whole.

Friends, whatever we have been able to achieve in our country, it has been done while working within the framework of a democratic system. We must recognise that it is the Parliament of India that has been acting as an agent of social and economic change. Our Parliament represents the people of India and members enter the portals of this highest legislative body shouldering the onerous responsibility of articulating peoples' concerns and grievances. Today, we have many bright and young parliamentarians who possess the talent to match the best from other Parliaments. The biggest asset of present day India is its youth which constitutes a substantial percentage of our population. It will be disastrous if the youth loses faith in our political processes. We need more and more young men and women to enter our political life which will infuse our system with a new vigour and vitality. Of course, contesting election is not that easy, and once elected, the task becomes much tougher as a member of Lok Sabha has to face the demands of more than a million people. It is indeed a challenge and also an opportunity to serve the people and the country. I am sure the youth of India are ready to face the challenge and help this country to gain its rightful place among the comity of nations. The academic community of the University of Delhi has an onerous responsibility in enabling and facilitating this process of democratic consolidation. With these words, I once again thank you all for extending me the honour of addressing this distinguished gathering.

Thank you.

SHOWCASING OUR DEMOCRATIC HERITAGE*

I deem it a great honour to welcome the Hon'ble President, the Hon'ble Chairman, Rajya Sabha, the Hon'ble Prime Minister and this distinguished gathering at the inauguration of the Parliament Museum set-up in the Parliament Library Building. We are grateful to you all for making it convenient to grace this occasion.

When this beautiful Parliament Library Building was constructed, space was allocated in the building for setting up a Parliament Museum. On my assumption of office, when the proposal for a Museum came before me I felt that we should try to set up a Museum which will truly represent the evolution of our country's democratic set up and reflect our heritage. Thereafter, we approached Dr. Saroj Ghose, one of the most well known authorities in this field, who has been the President of the Paris-based International Council of Museums, set up by the UNESCO, and who has been responsible for setting up the famed Science City Complex in Kolkata and the Kolkata Museum, with the idea and he came up with a project profile in no time. The subsequent presentation of the Museum scheme by Dr. Ghose before the Hon'ble Leaders of different Parties in Parliament, at a meeting I convened, was well-received and the blueprint and the script for the Museum also received the approval of the Hon'ble Leaders. On that basis, Dr. Saroj Ghose has set up our Museum with the help of the officers and staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat, with full technical assistance from the Kolkata Museum. I am grateful to all the Hon'ble Leaders for their kind cooperation and full support to this idea.

A Parliamentary Museum, in a country like ours, whose democratic tradition goes back to the ancient times, has a special significance. It is expected to present before the visitors the evolution and success of our democratic experiments, of our freedom struggle, and, more importantly, highlight the structure and characteristics of the supreme legislative institution of the country. A visitor to the Museum would go back with an insight into some of the most important aspects of our democratic heritage.

The Parliament Museum has been designed to serve as a hi-tech 'story telling museum', depicting the continuum of our democratic ethos and institutional development. It is different from the other Museums in the sense

* At the inauguration of the Parliament Museum in the Parliament Library Building, New Delhi (14 August 2006).

that it is not a Museum of objects but of events. The main aspects of our democratic and parliamentary heritage are told with the help of walk-through period settings, with sound-light-video synchronization, large screen interactive computer multi-media, and immersive visualization with multi-screen panoramic projection, virtual reality and animatronics. The Museum is also equipped with a resource centre with a fully computerized textual and visual information bank.

The visitors to the Museum will be treated to a 'speaking display' of Indian democracy. Various facets of our democratic traditions from ancient India and different events associated with our freedom movement will come alive before them with multi-layered graphics and multi-vision presentations, with sound-and-light animation, video projection, and computer multi-media with audio effects. I am sure, the distinct features of the Museum will be found very informative by the visitors, giving them an insight into the history of the development of political institutions in India, about the struggles and sacrifices that had gone into the process of that evolution and of the great men and women who provided leadership to our movement for freedom. That understanding, I hope, will help particularly the new generation to aspire for reaching greater heights and inspire them to participate enthusiastically in the process of nation-building and for consolidating the gains of democracy in the country.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Padmashri Dr. Saroj Ghose for his tireless efforts in executing this project within a very demanding time-frame. Dr. Ghose, who retired as the Director-General of the National Council of Science Museum (NCSM) has been instrumental in the conceptual design, script and exhibit development of the Museum. In this effort, he was ably assisted by Shri D. Basu and Shri Amit Sarkar, both of whom had also worked in NCSM. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Shri Basu and Shri Sarkar as well. I would also like to compliment the officers and staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat and other allied agencies for their dedicated efforts and support in executing the project expeditiously and efficiently. The Lok Sabha Secretariat is working out the details for facilitating access to the Museum for the general public, especially the students and our young citizens very soon. With these words, I once again welcome the distinguished gathering on this momentous occasion. I am hopeful that this endeavour will go a long way in imparting an informed perception of our constitutional and parliamentary heritage to the visitors to this Museum which, in turn, will further promote our commitment to democratic and parliamentary ideals.

Thank you.

ENSURING EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY: ROLE OF COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ASSURANCES*

I am honoured to be amidst you all at the Inaugural Function of the Conference of the Chairmen of Committees on Government Assurances of Parliament and the State and Union territory Legislatures. This is the fourth Conference being held after an interval of nearly two decades and as such was overdue. It is proper that the Conference will deliberate on some of the vital issues of the accountability mechanism which we have developed for legislative oversight of the administration.

Over the years, transparency, accountability and good governance have become the watchwords for democracies across the world. It is essential to ensure the accountability of the public administration which sustains parliamentary democracy. Thus, our Legislative Bodies at the Centre and in the States should exercise continuous vigil over the way public policies and programmes are implemented by various Ministries and Departments.

In this context, the Committee on Government Assurances, which is essentially an Indian innovation, occupies a very important place in the Committee System we have evolved. You would recall that this Committee was set up for the first time in 1953 at the initiative of the then Lok Sabha Speaker, Shri G. V. Mavalankar, for a systematic follow-up of the implementation of ministerial assurances. Over time, this Committee has proved to be an indispensable tool in securing Executive accountability, particularly in relation to the implementation of the assurances given by the Ministers on the floor of the House. Subsequently, the Rajya Sabha and the Legislatures of many States and Union territories also set up such Committee. Today, this Committee has become an effective tool in ensuring ministerial accountability, as it specifically deals with the assurances given by the Ministers while answering questions or making statements on the floor of the House. What makes this Committee unique is that the assurances proffered or the promises made by the Ministers do not lapse on the dissolution of the elected House as the reconstituted Committee examines all assurances which remained pending at the time of the dissolution of the House.

* At the inauguration of the Conference of the Chairmen of the Committees on Government Assurances of Parliament and the State and Union Territory Legislatures, New Delhi (31 October 2006).

The Committee on Government Assurances of the Lok Sabha, over the years, has made some very important recommendations of far-reaching significance. For instance, in their Ninth Report presented during the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, the Committee had very justifiably observed that as States and Union territories were not very forthcoming with the required information, some mechanism should be evolved by the Union Government to make it obligatory on their part to furnish the required information to Parliament promptly. I am happy to note that under the guidance of Shri Harin Pathak, the Committee on Government Assurances of the Lok Sabha has made some significant observations regarding the functioning of various ministries. In its very First Report, the Committee has taken the view that in case of charges of corruption, the Ministries should themselves initiate action against erring persons rather than wait for the CBI to finish its investigation. I would like to felicitate the Committees of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for the good work they are doing and urge them to make this accountability mechanism as effective as possible.

As we all know, culling out of ministerial assurances or undertakings from the proceedings of the House remains the basic and the most vital activity in the functioning of this Committee. In this regard, the directions and guidelines on what specific expressions used by the Ministers on the floor of the House can be taken to mean assurances have to be very clearly specified to rule out any ambiguity. The staff engaged in this work should be given proper training to carry out their work efficiently because any omission at this level is bound to have repercussions on the whole mechanism over which rests the Committee's functioning. As such, ways and means to manage this crucial aspect more efficiently need to be explored to make the whole process flawless. I hope the Conference will come out with concrete suggestions to further streamline the procedure followed in various Legislatures to take note of the ministerial assurances and ensure their timely implementation.

As per the rules of procedure, there is a time-frame within which the ministerial assurances are supposed to be implemented. Non-adherence to the time schedule in implementing the assurances frustrates the very purpose of creating this institutional mechanism. I understand this has been a major problem-area for this Committee in every Legislature and the matter needs careful consideration because in certain cases, due to delay, the assurances may lose their importance and relevance. The Committee is the right forum to discuss and deliberate on the varied mechanisms to improve the system by arriving at a realistic time frame taking into consideration the ground realities in the concerned Legislature and the State and also by considering new mechanisms to identify those officials responsible for the delay and taking appropriate action to avoid such delay. As Chairmen, you have to give a collective thought to the issue.

It is said that in several Legislatures, the Committee has been facing the problem of not receiving the replies from the concerned Departments in a proper manner. Evasive or incomplete replies is a major problem, which the Committee has to deal with effectively. Lackadaisical attitude on the part of the Executive Departments, I am afraid, is totally antithetical to the principle of Executive accountability to the Legislature and should not be countenanced.

I understand from the Agenda of the Conference that you are going to discuss some very important procedural matters. One of the Agenda items for consideration before this Conference is—whether the announcements made by the Finance Minister in his Budget Speech shall constitute 'assurances'. One can very well understand that the Finance Minister makes announcements in his Budget Speech with due provision for allocation during that particular financial year. Logically, any such announcement needs to be implemented within the framework of the provisions made in the Budget. The Committee on Government assurances should deliberate as to what extent a budget announcement by the Finance Minister could be considered as an 'assurance' for the purpose of legislative scrutiny.

A Conference like this provides an opportunity to discuss issues of common concern to all of us and we can always benefit from the exchange of our experiences. As Chairmen, you have enormous responsibility on your shoulders, and you have not only to ensure smooth conduct of the Committee proceedings but also the timely implementation of its recommendations. It is indeed gratifying that the Committee on Government Assurances in each of our Legislatures has been exercising the utmost vigilance in ensuring that the administration does not evade or escape its responsibility in implementing, without delay, the assurances given by the Ministers in the House. As the Committee on Government Assurances has to deal with a large number of assurances given by the Ministers on the floor of the House every year, it has to be ensured that adequate procedural and infrastructure support is provided to the Committee along with a properly trained staff.

Friends, the Committee on Government Assurances is always expected to take a balanced view during the scrutiny of ministerial assurances as the Executive may face unforeseen hurdles and, therefore, may take more time than expected in the implementation of the assurances. In our zeal to ensure the accountability of the Executive, we have to be cautious enough not to take a confrontational stance in our functioning. After all, we all are part of the same State structure and the goal of improving the conditions in the country remains common to the executive as well as to the legislature. While some of us are entrusted with the responsibility of running the Government, the others are there to ensure that the functioning of the Government remains transparent and action-oriented in accordance with the wishes of the people who are the real masters in our democratic system.

Friends, there is a feeling among a large section of the people, which is articulated from time to time in different fora, including the Judiciary, if I may say so, criticising the functioning of the Parliament, and the Executive; thereby, a lot of cynicism is also created in the country, especially, among the youth about the efficacy of the entire democratic structure in our country. It is for us to be conscious of the great responsibility, which the people of the country or the people of different States have given to us. It is our bounden duty to discharge that responsibility in a manner that the public confidence is reposed in us, and the confidence that is reposed in us is proved to be justified.

We have to be role models in the matter of discharge of our duties and functions. If it is felt by the people, especially, the young people that the parliamentary democracy is not serving the interest of the country, then it will be the saddest day. Therefore, we have to see that we in the Parliament or in the Legislatures—who have the great honour to be chosen by the people of this country in their judgement—are able to fulfil the urges and aspirations of the people. They have a right to good governance; they have a right to transparent governance; and it is the responsibility of the Government and the Ministers of the Government, who are chosen from amongst the elected members of either Parliament or the Legislature. Therefore, these elected members—in whom the people have reposed their trust—have to discharge their duty, be it as Ministers or members of the Legislatures, in a manner that fulfils and justifies the trust reposed in them. One important part of the ministerial discharge of duties is to govern properly, and they do give assurances in the matter of governance as members raise questions. It is essential that those assurances are fulfilled. Hence, we should work as a watchdog over the functioning of the ministerial responsibility.

As I said earlier, we need not take up an attitude of confrontation, but certainly we should, in a spirit of cooperation, see that the Ministers discharge their duties, and the Government of the day fulfils the obligations they have undertaken for themselves. If we fail to do it, and if the people realize that the whole system is non-productive; that assurances given are not complied with; that we are not acting as proper watchdog; and that we are not looking concerned about the interest of the people, then what is happening today is that other organs are taking upon themselves the responsibility for it as if they were governing this country. Today, it is being said that the policy decisions will be taken elsewhere, and not in the Parliament or the Legislatures. It is being said that implementation is the duty of some other agency, and not that of the Legislature or the Government.

I am only saying that these are trying times. Please take it, with utmost seriousness and concern. There is a tremendous pressure on the whole system

of democratic functioning. It was always felt, and is still believed, that the policy decisions are to be taken by the Executive in consultation with the Legislature. Now, it is being taken elsewhere. Implementation is being done elsewhere. I shall be looking forward to your concrete suggestions, which all of us can consider for implementation not only in different Legislatures but also in the Parliament of India.

Friends, I wish you all the best. I am sure, all of you have gathered here with the paramount interest of the country in mind. I am very happy that Shri Harin Pathak, a very dynamic and a very esteemed member of Parliament is taking interest, with the cooperation of all the other Members of the Committee, in discharging the functions of the Committee which fulfils not only the needs of the regulations or rules, but also, act in such manner fulfilling the requirements and expectations of the people. As I said, people are the masters of this country, and our commitment is to uphold the democratic structure for which the people of this country suffered a lot. That is why, our Founding Fathers, after tremendous, wide-ranging deliberations, decided that parliamentary democracy is the best system of governance. I believe that there is no alternative to that.

I hope the discussions and deliberations during this Conference will provide an opportunity to each of you to share your rich experiences and to exchange valuable ideas. I am sure that under the Chairmanship of Shri Harin Pathak, this Conference will go a long way in further improving the functioning and efficacy of the Committee on Government Assurances in our Legislative Bodies. I wish you all the best. I am sure, this will be a great Conference and a very successful one. With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Conference.

Thank you very much.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION: IMPACT ON STRENGTHENING OF DEMOCRACY*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver the Special Lecture in memory of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, one of the most illustrious Founding Fathers of independent India, an eminent educationist, a parliamentarian par excellence, an acclaimed statesman, a great humanist and, above all, an ardent advocate of national unity and integrity. The Lecture, I am given to understand, has been instituted by Dr. Arati Bhattacharjee, in memory of her most illustrious Father in a befitting manner. I compliment her for this initiative.

Friends, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee inherited a rich tradition of scholarship and fearlessness from his Father, the illustrious Sir Asutosh Mookerjee and himself was a man of profound convictions who left an indelible imprint on our national fabric. His brilliant academic record earned him fame far and wide and subsequently the honour of becoming the youngest Vice-Chancellor of this prestigious University. In this capacity, Dr. Mookerjee strove ceaselessly to put his innovative ideas on education into practice. Delivering his second Convocation Address at the University on 12 February 1936, he explained his vision of education. 'Our ideal is to provide extensive facilities for education from the lowest grade to the highest, to mould our 'educationalist' purpose and to draw out the best qualities that be hidden in our youth and to train them intellectually, physically for devoted service in all spheres of national activity, in villages, in towns and cities.' He went on to add:

> Our ideal is to link up education with the best elements of our culture and civilization drawing strength, wherever necessary, from the fountain of Western skill and knowledge. Our ideal is to make our universities and educational institutions the home of liberty and sane and progressive thought—generously assisted by the State and the public—where teachers and students will meet and work in an atmosphere of harmony and mutual understanding, where none will suffer on grounds of caste, sex, creed and religious or political belief.

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* At the Fourth Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Special Lecture on *Empowerment through Education—Impact on Strengthening of Democracy*, University of Calcutta, Kolkata (20 January 2007).

With these objectives in view, Dr. Mookerjee endeavoured to reorganize the University syllabus and the examination system. Special emphasis was laid on teachers' training, giving Bengali and the vernacular languages their due status in the curricula, and thrust to technical and scientific disciplines. His multi-splendoured contributions were acknowledged by the Calcutta University when it conferred the Honorary Doctor of Laws on him at a Special Convocation in November 1938.

In the years that followed, Dr. Mookerjee devoted himself wholeheartedly to the task of nation building. As a Minister in the Bengal Cabinet, he worked tirelessly to uplift the poor and the weaker sections. His perceptive understanding of complex economic issues enabled him to discharge his duties as the Minister of Industry and Supply in the first National Government very successfully. He laid a firm foundation for the industrial development of the country. His constructive and enlightened approach and determined resistance to policies, which he regarded as inimical to national interests, made him a bulwark of freedom and democracy.

As a distinguished member of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee made sterling contributions to the drafting of the Constitution. In one of his many memorable presentations, while speaking on the Objectives Resolutions, he outlined his vision thus:

We shall go ahead with our work in spite of all difficulties and obstacles and help to create that great India, united and strong, which will be the motherland of not this community or that, not this class or that, but of every person, man, woman and child, inhabiting this great land, irrespective of race, caste, creed and community, where everyone will have an equal opportunity, an equal freedom, an equal status so that he or she could develop himself or herself to the best of his or her talents and serve faithfully and fearlessly this beloved common motherland of ours.

After his election to the First Lok Sabha, Dr. Mookerjee's stature and acumen as a statesman, his parliamentary skill, eloquence and deep understanding of the problems facing the country, made him a towering leader of the Opposition. The Treasury Benches always respected him for his contributions on the floor of the House and this earned him the sobriquet, 'The Lion of Parliament'.

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee enriched our national life in innumerable ways, more particularly as a tireless defender of fundamental freedoms and democracy and as a visionary educationist. As a tribute to this great educationist and outstanding parliamentarian, I have today chosen to speak on the theme of 'Empowerment through Education--Impact on Strengthening of Democracy', a subject I consider befitting his lofty ideals.

We are legitimately proud of being the largest functioning democracy. Our parliamentary polity has taken the best from other established democracies, but has a unique Indian imprint. It is aimed at providing an all-inclusive and participatory system of Government for the people. It calls for a shared vision for the future, as well as dedicated devotion to realizing the noble principles enshrined in the Constitution. Today we find ourselves faced with a complex, yet compelling challenge of enhancing the quality of our democratic systems and structure. There is expectedly no ready formula available in this situation, which many delineate in shades of despair and cynicism, with only faint rays of hope and optimism. The approach and strategy will necessarily have to cover a broad spectrum of initiatives in as many spheres, and will need to be powered by a firm resolve to make India the premier democracy which will be acknowledged, respected and honoured by all. It will bring the goal significantly closer and make it a realistic, deliverable one.

I state, with some anguish, that after nearly six decades of Independence, it is a tragic commentary on the nature of our development that one billion citizens of the country live in different centuries. We have islands of affluence. Alongside, we have the scourge of poverty, backwardness, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of healthcare and basic infrastructure. Not surprisingly, yet disappointingly, the UNDP's Human Development Report 2006, ranks India, at a dismal 96, out of 177 countries.

Certainly I do not belittle our achievements so far, but, as I see it, the unfortunate developmental deficit is a potential threat to our democratic structure. Taken in conjunction with the imperfections that have beset our polity, for a variety of reasons, we can ignore the writing on the wall only at our peril.

All of you I am sure, will endorse my firm belief that there is no known, acceptable alternative to democracy and that too based on parliamentary system. The question is how to address the glaring deficiencies which one can identify. As I envision it, an empowered India, epitomizing true democratic values, is one where every citizen will be a proactive participant in the ongoing exciting and stupendous task of national development. One of the most promising and effective mechanisms to actualize this is quality education for all, as this will mandate and ensure transparency, efficiency, accountability and good governance.

Democracy underpins the dignity of the individual and is based on the assumption of the infinite value and worth of human personality, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, race, gender or religion. Education, among others, inculcates those social and moral values among the citizens, provides exposure

o new ideas, liberates individuals from mental traps and suggests new lines of thought, throws up innovative solutions to old problems, creates different evels of aspirations and helps establish world-class benchmarks of achievements. One of the major tasks that education performs in a democratic ociety, is the preparation of young citizens for the roles and responsibilities hey must be ready to take on in their years ahead, which is extremely crucial n a culturally, socially, linguistically and ethnically diverse society such as ours.

Traditionally in India, education was monopolized along caste, as well as class lines. Realizing the importance of education, the concept of universal elementary education was incorporated in our Constitution. But despite the efforts made by successive Governments, the literacy level in our country still remains abysmally low. It is disheartening that 37 per cent of our population lacks literacy skills. There is not one modern economy in the world today that does not have a literacy rate of at least 80 per cent. About 53 per cent of our children drop out at the elementary stage itself. It is felt that our school system is characterized by an inflexibility that makes it resistant to change. Learning has tended to become an isolated activity which does not encourage linking knowledge with day-to-day life and its myriad facets in any organic or vital way. Very often, what is presented and transmitted in the name of learning in schools, bypasses vital dimensions of the human capacity to create new knowledge.

It is evident that our socio-political system has failed to ensure that at least a majority of children between the ages of 6 and 14 are in school—instead of making up the world's largest child labour force. Around 34 per cent and 53 per cent of the children enrolled in Class I do not complete Class V and Class VIII respectively. Most of these are dalits and adivasis and remain labourers all their lives.

The cess introduced to fund the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' is certainly a significant step forward. However, there needs to be a deeper conceptual appreciation of the imperative of compulsory and free school education, if the goal of universal elementary education is to be reached in the conceivable future. In his exhaustive work on child labour, literacy and school education in India, the political scientist, Myron Weiner, asserted the virtue of the State enforcing compulsory schooling by law and in a framework that rejects societal biases and hierarchical factors, which deprive large sections of classes and castes of the right to be educated.

Among the different social groups, the estimated percentage of out-of-school children is 9.97 per cent for Muslims, 9.54 per cent for Scheduled Tribes (STs), 8.17 per cent for Scheduled Castes (SCs), 6.9 per cent

for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and 3.73 per cent for others. At the national level, among the children who are out-of-school, 68.26 per cent are those who never went to school and 31.74 per cent are those who dropped out from school after one or more years of schooling. Among the dropouts, the highest percentage is of those who dropped out after completing Class II and Class V (20.5 per cent each).

According to a Planning Commission Report, a shocking 90 per cent of Muslim students drop out by the time they reach high school. Only 1 per cent of Muslim women and 3.4 per cent of men in urban areas are graduates. In rural areas only 0.7 per cent of Muslim men are graduates; there are too few women graduates to even register on a survey.

While enrolment rates for primary education are high at almost 50 per cent of the total age group, a large percentage of those enrolled drop out of school mid-way. Just a third of high school students graduate. We have earned – what is at best—the dubious distinction of a nation of drop-outs. By 2015, 55 per cent of our population will be under 20. But we may well squander our demographic edge. Further, without a much deeper reservoir of educated youth, India may see its gains in software and manufacturing evaporate. No country can survive if its young lose hope about their future. You may have heard of a private initiative, which (in 2004) implemented an incentive scheme, whereby State schools with the best students and teachers attendance and the biggest improvement in scores were awarded US $ 500. Some others have developed Village Parent-Teacher Associations to improve State schools. Without radical changes, India's greatest asset may be squandered. We must have the national sense to invest in people, upgrade their skills, so that they can achieve more for the country. How can we develop if we exclude one-fourth of our workforce from the system?

It has been suggested by many competent people that Government funding on education should be raised from the current 0.9 per cent of GDP to at least 2.5 per cent, as recommended in the first Report of the National Knowledge Commission, released by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 12 January 2007. You may know that China spends 8 per cent on education. Further, it is very uneven across urban and rural areas. When citizens are provided facilities unequally, a formula like the Gadgil Formula to allocate Central funds to States may be worked out to allocate funds to students in Government schools in an equitable manner and ensure its better utilization. This will address the avoidable deterioration of public education facilities that has led to mounting concern about quality and increasing costs that have put it out of the ambit of wide sections of population. Thus, it is felt that future plans of the Government need to focus on both design and implementation in a manner that these loopholes are plugged.

On another plane, gender disparity in education, as prevalent in our country, substantially weakens the democratic fabric of our country. According to the Planning Commission's National Human Development Report, 2001, the gender empowerment index was just 67.6 per cent in the early 90s, implying that women trailed by a third in human development indicators. Not that we need data to bring home what is an everyday reality, but there are many States where gender indicators are worse than in sub-Saharan Africa. Such gender disparity is directly linked with gender inequality at the level of family and society. No doubt, the educational empowerment of our female population finds expression in the legal as well as programmatic framework of our national endeavour. Our Constitution is committed to providing full and compulsory education to all up to the age of 14 years irrespective of gender. The 86th Constitution Amendment Act, 2002 has made elementary education a Fundamental Right for all children in the age-group of 6 to 14 years. This apart, the National Policy on Education, 1986 and the Programme of Action, 1992 are the other guiding documents that focus on various aspects of women's educational empowerment. But unfortunately, the female literacy rate in our country is still strikingly lower than that of men.

Steps will have to be taken to ensure gender-parity in education by educating the families and communities about the benefits of girls' education by providing incentives to enroll and retain the girls in schools. If we fail to overcome the obstacles to education, particularly in the case of women, a major portion of our population will be prevented from exercising their human rights. They will even be deprived of meaningful political participation. Illiterate or semi-literate women are far less likely to be candidates for office or to be active in political parties, especially at the higher levels. Democracy cannot thrive unless and until there is equal participation of men and women in politics, and different national activities and for that to happen, educational empowerment is a must. Removing the factors that hinder the full participation of women in the various spheres of society is, therefore, a very important concomitant towards the empowerment of our women.

This becomes all the more critical in view of the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution, reserving one-third of the seats in the local elected bodies for women and the decade long demand for similar reservation at the State and National levels. Surprisingly, it has been difficult to build a political consensus on the latter issue. A number of Parties, especially those in the Left, have strongly supported introduction of the Bill to provide one-third reservation of seats to women and its debate in the Parliament, rather than the unusual approach of successive Governments to attempt to craft a common stand of Political Parties even before it is taken up by Parliament. It is my dream among several others that this historic Bill be

passed during my tenure as the Speaker, Lok Sabha. There is a tremendous groundswell of support for it and I must emphasize, the support is not only from women, but from all segments of society. It is important to understand why there is a spontaneous pressure for affirmative action such as this. It stems from the fundamental realization that only a substantive say in public affairs by women will ensure that they are taken with due seriousness in all matters affecting their lives. Further, it will enable them, over a period of time, to break out of centuries, where women have been conditioned to accept their inferior status as a natural 'given' condition, even to question which is blasphemous.

I must highlight, in this connection, that literacy for women, must encompass legal literacy to equip them to stand up for their rights, resist societal oppression and firmly quash all moves to marginalize them and deprive them of dignity and a voice. I know that many of our citizens in rural areas, both male and female, and especially women—who carry the major responsibility of looking after their families' interests—have barely any idea of laws that directly impact their day-to-day lives such as the gender-neutral (in terms of payment of wages) National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Right to Information Act and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. Information available with many of our citizens and specially rural women about other constitutionally guaranteed Rights is probably—without indulging in hyperbole—non-existent. The women, particularly those who are uneducated, are condemned to a life of drudgery, made more unbearable by the burden of low self-esteem and are unfairly reduced to the pitiable condition of largely unappreciated, bearing and rearing machines. One may rightly say that literacy and information, on their own, are not adequate to take on an entrenched system that perpetuates suppression of women's rights and that accessing them requires financial and other related resources, which majority of Indian women do not possess. It is an imperfect situation and even the much-applauded judicial activism—hasn't really touched the core of women's problems in our country. However, the situation, while remaining imperfect, is not totally bereft of hope. There are reputed organizations, which are sincerely working to spread legal literacy and many of the Panchayats and State-supported Legal Aid Boards have put their weight behind this laudable endeavour. However, I appeal to you, who are associated with prestigious institutions of learning, to reach out so that this has a cascading effect and impacts the democratic fabric in a much more tangible manner. Education along with legal literacy will, no doubt, play a seminal role in assisting women in struggles against discrimination, exploitation, inequalities and social injustice. This also applies to men, who have been denied access to education.

There has to be a symbiotic link between the importance of economic empowerment of women and the opening up of wider political spaces for them. The appreciation of this link will provide tremendous opportunities of self-expression and realization of women's inherent potential, not only, to their own but also the larger benefit of the family, society and the country. Education has the tremendous possibility of creating awareness about the options available and preparing women for suitable avenues of economic autonomy and independence. As you know, our country has had a great tradition of women's entrepreneurship and we need not look only at the formal avenues of employment and income-generation. While Indra Nooyi and Kiran Shaw Mazumdar do us proud, we cannot forget the enduring contributions of the likes of Ela Bhatt, who through vibrant grass-root level organisations like SEWA and the Mahila Bank, have changed dramatically the lives of millions of ordinary, struggling women, for whom making daily ends meet, remains a stark, primary goal. Mohammad Yunus, the Nobel Laureate from neighbouring Bangladesh, has been duly recognized for Grameen Bank, his pioneering work on women-centred SHGs (Self Help Groups) and in India, too, the record of such organisations has been truly impressive. You will be heartened to note that repayment rates in these SHGs in India is 99 per cent, which is a record, the world-over and needs to be celebrated.

I cannot but elaborate on the long term and dramatic changes that empowered women's participation in Institutions will bring about. I am convinced that they will lead the crusade—and that is what I truly believe is called for—to cleanse our polity and steer it safely away from divisiveness, corruption and violence that sadly seems to be all pervasive today. The ills of communalism, institutionalized injustice to disadvantaged sections of society, intolerance and confrontational politics can well and truly be addressed largely through equitable gender participation.

When Swaraj was declared, Gandhiji said: 'as long as women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country.' Certainly, there are constitutional provisions for women's empowerment and participation in the field of grass-roots level governance in the country. The system of Local Self-Government as manifested in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has no doubt taken a leap forward in guaranteeing a life of dignity and respect to the women, particularly in rural areas. As per statistics available, more than 8 lakh women have entered in Panchayats with a large number of them holding the position of Chairperson. The representation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has shown an increasing trend. Several studies affirm the soundness of the policy of one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and the basic finding has been that women have done exceptionally well. In many of the Panchayats, which are headed

by women, not only has the participation and leadership of women made an impact on grass-roots governance, it has also shattered many of the myths regarding women's inability to handle power and responsibility outside their homes. While the women through the Panchayati Raj Institutions are making the State sensitive to the issues of the times, particularly those concerning poverty, inequality and gender injustice, they are also helping to change women's own perception about themselves. They have infused confidence and inculcated a sense of empowerment among the women population by enabling them to exercise control over resources, officials and more importantly by challenging their male counterparts. Women's entry into the Panchayati Raj Institutions has also given them the opportunity to mobilize struggle and raise local level issues particularly those concerning health, sanitation, education, water, alcohol abuse and domestic violence.

But it is unfortunate that women have not been assigned positions in the grass-roots level democratic institutions commensurate with their overall strength in the society. The ground reality is that despite one-third reservation for women at the Panchayats and local bodies levels in the governance process, their presence has not made the desired impact to the fullest extent for various reasons. It was earlier found that in some cases, they were only 'namesake' members without active participation in the functioning of these democratic institutions. It had been observed in some areas, that women representatives in Panchayats functioned in accordance with the directions of the male members of their family. This was all because of the illiteracy among the rural women who require basic education and also training in the working of various grass-roots level democratic institutions. Democracy cannot flourish unless women are properly educated and encouraged and better conditions are created to enable them work creatively and constructively in all spheres of life.

Empowerment through education will considerably help to check violence against women and other atrocities and embolden them to fight for their own rights. According to the 2001 Census, women constitute 48.2 per cent of the country's population. For centuries, they have been accorded inferior status in our male-dominated society and their exploitation cuts across caste and class lines. Their struggle for survival starts well before their birth. Foeticide, after sex determination and female infanticide are, in fact, a blot on our democracy. We know from experience that mere passing of laws is not enough to control women's exploitation at work places as well as at homes. Socially inferior status of women has made them a soft target of domestic violence and exploitation. Education will certainly help them fight exploitation, but there has to be the attitudinal change of the society at large that is required to truly emancipate women. It is a shame that even highly educated and professionally qualified people have been found to indulge in various kinds

of exploitation of women. All this goes to show that the road to gender equity is going to be long and arduous where the basic level of education will have to be accompanied by conscious attempts to promote progressive and liberal thoughts to bring behavioural changes in the society. In this context, the passing of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill by our Parliament is an important step forward.

It is heartening to note the achievements of the Self Help Groups that have proved to be an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas. The experience of Self Help Groups (SHGs) will facilitate better management of public affairs by women. Educational empowerment, together with economic empowerment, would certainly give a boost to women's overall empowerment and go a long way in making our democracy more meaningful and vibrant.

To prepare our young generation for effective and responsible participation in democracy, we need to make our educational system democracy-sensitive with a systematic and continual emphasis on the relevant values. Such a system would enable our student community to develop civic virtues and to practise behavioural disposition of good citizens that include self-control and discipline, commitment to justice and fairness, respect for differing perceptions, compassion for others, tolerance and respect for equal worth, and dignity of the individual. All these traits constitute the core of democratic citizenship. Mahatma Gandhi had visualized education as a means to awakening the nation's consciousness to injustice, violence and inequality entrenched in the social order. Even a country with the very best of Constitutions, institutions and laws will not have a sustainable democracy unless citizens take it upon themselves the responsibility of breathing vibrancy into its structures. In fact, in today's knowledge-based and technology-driven society, citizens are much more enabled to be active participants, rather than passive spectators or occasional participants.

The right to education is one of the fundamental human rights which is essential and indispensable for the exercise of all other rights and also for future development. Education is the primary vehicle by which the economically and socially marginalized people can lift themselves out of the mire of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in community affairs. None of the civil, political, economic and social rights can be exercised by individuals unless they have received a certain minimum education.

In his Convocation Address at the Banaras Hindu University on 8 February 1935, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore said:

> As a people we must be fully conscious of what we are... The fact is, we have a feeble human interest in our own country. We love to talk

> about politics and economics; we are ready to soar into the thin air of academic abstractions, or roam in the dusk of pedantic wildernesses; but we never care to cross our social boundaries and come to the door of our neighbouring communities, personally to enquire how they think and feel and express themselves, and how they fashion their lives.... The best function of our education centres is to help us to know ourselves and then along with it, the other mission will be fulfilled, which is to inspire us to give ourselves to society.

Prof. Amartya Sen, the Noble Laureate has aptly observed:

> When people are illiterate, their ability to understand and invoke their legal rights can be very limited, and educational neglect can also lead to other kinds of deprivation. Indeed, this tends to be a persistent problem for people at the bottom of the ladder, whose rights are often effectively alienated because of their inability to read and see what they are entitled to demand and how. The educational gap clearly has a class connection...If we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure.

More vigorous efforts are required to remove the obstacles that deny children's access to school and at the same time to address the problems that threaten their retention in and completion of schooling. Since education is the responsibility of both the Central and State Governments in our country, appropriate legislation needs to be enacted and enforced. As the National Knowledge Commission has suggested in its First Report, we must have appropriate legislation to implement the Fundamental Right to Education. The right to education, it feels, should be justiciable. Concrete plans and mechanisms must also be developed to identify populations of children who are under-served by the prevailing educational system or who face discrimination in accessing education. Simultaneously, we need to urgently bridge the wide gap between the opportunities available to the rich, educated and urban-centred people and the poor, illiterate, or semi-literate rural and other disadvantageously placed.

There are no shortcuts or magic formulae to address fundamental problems of access, equity and gender inequality on the one hand and quality, content and relevance on the other. If education has to become an integral part of people's survival and their fight for a life of dignity and self-respect, then as a nation we have to start the churning from within. Different components like access, quality, teacher attitudes and pedagogic renewal have to be addressed simultaneously, ensuring confluence and synergy.

An integrated approach is necessary for meaningful change and lasting and sustainable impact. Playing with numbers and showing the world that

we have indeed cracked the education problem helps no one—if anything, it is a self-deluding and self-defeating exercise.

As a country that aspires to be a knowledge super power, the quality, access and infrastructure of higher and technical education, too calls for serious attention. The current public debates on reservation of seats for disadvantaged groups and communities of seats in institutions of higher learning, bring out sharply how under-served the population is and how disastrous is the scramble for scarce resources. The National Knowledge Commission has recommended a Deprivation Index to deal with this problem, by providing weighted scores to students and using cumulative scores to supplement a student's school examination score. This may be considered by the Governments and leading centres of learning like Universities along with other options.

Our higher education system should be able to channelize the vigour and vitality of our youth to the democratic processes and nation-building. The National Knowledge Commission has said that India should have 1,500 Universities by 2015, more than a four-fold increase from the present 350. It has asked for establishment of 50 National Universities that can provide education of the highest standards. Further, it has sought an Independent Regulatory Authority to monitor these standards and degrees. Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee had said:

> There need not be any conflict amongst primary, secondary and university stages nor amongst literary, scientific, technical, vocational and agricultural courses of study. A national system of education must conceive of a balanced structure where due and proper emphasis will be laid on every section so as to maintain its harmony, its strength and solidarity...It is a supreme task for university administrators and teachers to read into the minds of the youth of re-awakened India and to place before them not only well-regulated courses of study and well-thought out programmes for extra-curricular activities but also rousing in them a true scientific spirit and a deep impulse for devoted service to the cause of national well-being.

While taking on board the existing lacunae in our educational system, we must appreciate that the situation can be improved with due effort and determination. I would like to very categorically highlight the link between empowerment through quality, affordable and accessible education and the future sustainability and strengthening of our democracy. This link has either not been understood in the proper perspective or projected as such.

As I said at the outset, a well-informed and proactive citizenry is an essential precondition for democracy to succeed. Democracy is not all about

forms alone. It is the people who have to provide substance and content to democracy. If people do not take part in public life, then democracy cannot be said to be functioning in a meaningful way. Freedom and democracy are unremitting endeavours. To keep the democratic traditions of our country alive, we will have to make political education a compulsory component.

A large number of citizens are today concerned about the content and quality of our democracy and also about the declining values in our national life, particularly in the wake of the emergence of divisive forces confronting the nation. Today, corruption is eating into the vitals of our nation and undesirable elements have intruded into the political arena and the institutions of our democracy. The responsibility for our failures on the political front and for providing the space for divisive elements to make headway in our national life has to be shared by all of us. Our educated elite, who should be the conscience-keepers of our democracy, should not choose to keep themselves away from the mainstream politics. The system, after all, is made up of people and when educated people get more and more involved into the system, it is bound to improve. It is high time our educated citizenry took the responsibility and joined our political life so that they can take on the challenge of changing the system from within more effectively and meaningfully. The recent Supreme Court verdict of 10 January 2007 has established, as has been contended by me humbly as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the importance of the preserving and upholding the dignity of Parliament, which represents the will of the people of India and has the right to have as its members those who uphold the high, cherished values of our Constitution and civilization.

Issues like intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, confrontations and disrespect for dissent are increasingly vitiating our socio-political system. The cynicism that is creeping into the minds of the people, especially the youth, is undoubtedly a matter of grave concern. Their questioning of the efficacy of our institutions of governance is something which should make all of us ponder over the quality and content of our democracy and also the declining values of our national life. The disillusionment with the content and context of our democracy and also with those in political life which we are witnessing today will have disastrous consequences unless and until all of us seriously address this problem. As the level of literacy and education increases, as the quality of life improves, as communication and information become more easily accessible, this is bound to be a resultant rise in the expectations of the people about the content and quality of democracy. More and more people will—and rightly so—question how and why convicted criminals can retain seats in Parliament and why and how 'tainted' individuals continue to associate with the political structures, facilitated largely by the delays of a 'creaking' and overburdened judicial system. That is why an educated citizenry is described as the greatest asset of a democracy. All these

call for strengthening of our democratic system both in terms of quality and content as also making our institutions of Government more transparent, accountable, responsible and responsive. The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. Corruption will not have a place in such governance, nor will there be place for divisive forces. In this process of empowerment through education, and the image correction of our democratic process, all stakeholders, especially the Legislature, the Judiciary, the political parties, the media, the civil society, and the academia should play a productive role.

As we have seen, there are numerous challenges before the nation which our educational system can address in unison with our democratic institutions and civil society organizations. But the choices in our life and our ability to participate in democratic processes and educational practice would depend on our ability to contribute to society in various ways. It is imperative that we pool in all our human resources and our collective strength towards nation-building and not allow it go waste in the name of emotive and divisive issues.

Friends, we have to create a culture of commitment to democracy and democratic values such as equality, justice, freedom, concern for others' well-being, secularism, respect for human dignity and rights. It is high time that we took meaningful and productive initiatives to empower our people through education aimed at building a commitment to all these values which are based on reason and understanding. Education devoid of these values is bound to give rise to destabilizing and divisive tendencies in society, which will be deleterious to the health of our democracy as is very disheartenningly happening in some parts.

Since taking over as Speaker of the Lok Sabha, I have taken some initiatives to bring the House closer to the people. This includes starting a 24-hour Lok Sabha TV Channel, the only one of its kind in the world so that the Visitors' Gallery is extended to the entire country. I dream that an active interest is taken by our electorate in each and every matter that comes up in the House and Committees and that they play a signal 'Oversight' role *vis-a-vis* the elected representatives. I have even gone on record on several occasions saying that the 'Right to Recall' be institutionalized. I have also been staunchly seeking citizen support for upholding the separation of powers enshrined in our Constitution and which constitutes its basic structure.

Speaking in the First Lok Sabha soon after its constitution, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee spoke:

> As I was looking to this House for the last two days, I felt, as must have been the feeling of many members of this House, that here we

witness the epitome of free India. We here are representative men and women coming from all parts of India elected on adult franchise, representing diverse viewpoints, varied outlook, but I know it, all imbued with one idea and one idea alone: how to make our freedom effective and how to advance the interests of the millions of people of India. It is one of the greatest experiments of history that we are making. Every one of us, no matter to which group or party we may belong, whether we are independents or dependants, must be able to look at the problems from the widest standpoint and while appreciating the differences among ourselves, we must try to resolve these difficulties and come to conclusions which will be to the good of the country. If we fail to adjust our differences, what is the alternative before the country? If this great experiment fails, if we go on according to the old fashion with the tyranny of the majority or under a megalomaniac dictatorship, if we do not accept that there are diverse viewpoints honestly expressed and an adjustment of these viewpoints is an essential ingredient of the successful working of democratic government, the alternative will be chaos. The alternative will be a sense of helplessness, frustration in the minds of the people and things will go beyond the control of every one.

The destiny of a nation is built upon the character of its citizens which is shaped largely by education. The people of our country, especially the younger generation, has to ever bear in mind that the future does not belong to those who are complacent and content with today, conveniently ignoring and being indifferent to the larger social milieu and its stark realities. The future, rather, would belong to those who are receptive to new thinking, new ideas and bold initiatives. They should question, be inquisitive and challenge their mental faculties so as to come out with viable solutions to the multiple challenges before the country and make India the pride of the world. Political apathy has to be replaced by political activism, and in this crucial task, an educationally empowered youth must be the torch-bearers of our democracy. This is the message we need to internalize from the lives of leaders like Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. They have bequeathed to us a legacy and a tradition of commitment and conviction, selflessness and sacrifice.

Paying tributes to Dr. Mookerjee on his untimely demise, his contemporary Prof. Hiren Mukherjee, who often crossed swords with him on ideological fronts, rose to dizzy heights of poetry:

'A giant has departed...lo' the sun
of a colossal intellect has set,
The giants are departing one by one
To whom our mourning nation owes a debt.

Incalculable debt that shall be paid
With understanding in the waging strife
We dare not rest until our hands have made
A mighty structure of our nation's life.'

My father late N.C. Chatterjee, who was one of the closest colleagues of Dr. Mookerjee, both inside the Lok Sabha and outside, had echoed similar sentiments:

> I am most stunned by the cruel blow which constitutes the most tragic loss to Bengal and India....When the truth will be told by future historians, the country will appreciate that Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was all along actuated by the highest national interest. The only solace in this terrible calamity is that so long as life was in him, Dr. Mookerjee was inspired by true patriotism, which transcended provincial or party interest.

It is left to us to follow without fail the high ideals and noble traditions laid down by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee and strive, not to rest, till we build the mighty structure of our nation's life. In the midst of much around that is neither encouraging nor uplifting, I take heart from the high expectations and hopes the electorate bestows on the elected representatives. My earnest appeal is that we help our citizens to get the best out of the existing democratic polity. I do not see a more potentially promising medium, than quality, affordable and accessible education to empower the people to participate in and receive what is truly their right in terms of all-round human development and growth.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank Prof. Asis Kumar Banerjee, the distinguished Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, once again for giving me the opportunity to deliver this Special Lecture in memory of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. I am sure this University will continue with its endeavours in promoting the ideals of the youngest Vice-Chancellor that this University was privileged and honoured to have.

Thank you.

STRENGTHENING OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver the Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab Lecture in memory of a great patriot who was indeed the *Utkal Keshari*. Dr. Mahtab was a towering personality who dominated the politics of Orissa for several decades and was rightly regarded as one of the makers of modern Orissa and, quite appropriately, came to occupy a prominent place in the national politics. Among the tallest leaders of the freedom movement from Orissa, Dr. Mahtab took part in all the major struggles for freedom, including the Quit India Movement launched under the leadership of Gandhiji, and underwent imprisonment several times for the cause of our freedom. He left an indelible imprint of his personality on every office he came to occupy—as the President of the State Congress Unit, as a Member of the Constituent Assembly and the Provisional Parliament and later as a Parliamentarian, as a Union Minister, as Chief Minister, as Governor, and as the Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly. I take this opportunity to pay my respectful homage to his memory.

An excellent organizer, Dr. Mahtab was entrusted with important responsibilities by Gandhiji, Pt. Nehru and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose during the crucial years of the freedom struggle in the 1930s and 1940s. He discharged all his responsibilities with sincerity and utmost commitment. In the years that followed freedom, Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab was among the chosen leaders to join Nehru's Cabinet and later to lead the State of Orissa as its Chief Minister.

As the Chief Minister of Orissa in the early years of freedom, it was his mission to bring about transformation of the State with the sole object of benefiting the people through the process of development. An able administrator, a crusader for social justice and a staunch votary of value-based politics, Dr. Mahtab's life was a saga of struggle and dedication to the cause of the country during the years of the freedom struggle and in the four eventful decades that followed freedom, until he passed away in 1987.

Dr. Mahtab's role and contributions to the process of the integration of the Indian States with the Union, in the wake of Independence, was remarkable. He had received rich compliments from none other than

* At the Twentieth Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab Memorial Lecture on *Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy*, Bhubaneswar (23 January 2007).

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel himself, who is credited with having provided effective leadership at the national level for that process. In a Foreword to Dr. Mahtab's book, *Beginning of the End*, which chronicles the merger of the Princely States within the Union of India, describing him as a 'practical statesman and a born leader of men', Sardar Patel wrote:

> He was the living spirit in the drama, (of the integration of the Princely States with the Indian Union) his was the enthusiasm which triumphed over difficulties and his was the persistence which at last succeeded. I am happy that I helped him to realise what was not only his dream and his ambition, but also the dream and ambition of all Oriyas. I am happier still that it was that backward Province, as they call it, which led the way for the rest of India to follow.

He had also made his mark as a great literateur, historian, scholar and publisher of repute and earned recognitions and awards from several quarters. All his life, his was a powerful voice in support of freedom, democracy and on issues like gender equity and socialist values.

Friends, it will be difficult to quantify the impact he made on his times and the contributions he made for the cause of the country's freedom, for national integration, for the promotion of democratic values and for the all-round development of the State of Orissa. I am very happy that this illustrious leader's legacy is being cherished and carried forward in its true spirit by his distinguished son, Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab, my colleague in Parliament, who is an example of gentleness, humility, learning, commitment to democratic values and public causes and fine parliamentary behaviour.

The life of Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab provides an eloquent testimony to his abiding dedication and unwavering commitment to the cause of freedom, parliamentary democracy and the development of the country. It is, therefore, as a fitting tribute to his memory that I have chosen to speak this evening on the theme 'Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy,' a subject always dear to his heart.

Despite all its drawbacks and imperfections, parliamentary democracy is the most widely accepted form of governance across the world today. One of the crucial choices our Founding Fathers had to make in the wake of freedom was on the system of government for free India. They opted for a parliamentary system in preference to the presidential system, after extensive discussion and debate, with the conviction that it would best reflect and represent the diversities of India and at the same time facilitate constructive governance of the country, instilling a sense of dignity and participation in our people who had come out of bondage and humiliation after centuries of subjugation.

The visionaries who were entrusted with the task of drafting the Constitution of free India, crafted a unique scheme of governance in which parliamentary democracy was cemented as the cornerstone of our constitutional edifice. They also amalgamated the principle of separation of powers with the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty in a manner underlining the primacy of the people in a democratic system and at the same time reinforcing the principle of constitutionalism. The centrality of the will of the people finds its best expression in the Preamble itself, which also is the very source of all institutions of governance. The words *'We, the People of India'* and *'do hereby Adopt, Enact and Give to Ourselves this Constitution'* recognize the sovereignty of the people and their primacy in our constitutional system and convey its eternal message.

One of our most significant achievements of the first half century of freedom, to my mind, is that we have sustained the system of parliamentary democracy for all these years, no doubt, with its imperfections. Having come through fourteen General Elections and experienced a good degree of political stability for over five and half decades, no one today will dispute that Indian democracy has come of age and that democracy is here to stay. This democratic consolidation, preserving and protecting the unity of a heterogeneous country with one billion plus people, practising different religions, speaking innumerable languages, and home to a wide variety of customs and practices, has indeed been a gigantic challenge that post-independent India met successfully, to the envy of many.

Today, we take great pride in asserting ourselves as the largest working democracy in the world and this is as it should be. But, we have to introspect about the quality of democracy that we have achieved and see to what extent has democracy facilitated development in the country. All of us realize that we still have a very long way to go in achieving our developmental potential and in fully consolidating the gains of six decades of democratic functioning.

Today's India, almost into the seventh decade of freedom, presents a contrasting picture of affluence and deprivation. On the one hand is the India of the affluent, of those who have had the benefit of modern education and are intellectually and materially empowered and, on the other, is the India of those who live under conditions of poverty, deprivation, squalor, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices. With a stratified social structure, characterized by inequity, gender-based discrimination, lopsided development, regional imbalances, with a sizeable section living below the poverty line, experiencing large-scale illiteracy, unemployment and under employment, and with substantial sections of our people denied of the benefits of modern science and technology, without access to safe drinking water and dependable energy supply, and good health-care, we have to concede that we have not

been able to take the fullest advantage of democratic governance in the past six decades. If our democratic governance does not succeed in addressing the concerns of the people, they will, no doubt, lose faith in democracy as a viable system capable of meeting their expectations.

Parliamentary democracy can be strengthened only when all our institutions that constitute our governance structure perform at their best keeping the interest of the people and the country in mind and in conformity with the fundamental law of the land, our Constitution. The Executive has to be seen to be functioning to address the concerns of the people, the Legislature reflecting the urges and aspirations of the people and the larger national causes as opposed to narrow partisan politics and the Judiciary as an independent arbiter dispensing speedy and inexpensive justice to every section of the people.

Today our people are, justifiably, getting impatient with the way our democratic institutions are functioning. Debates and discussions, the hallmarks of democracy, are being vitiated by disruption, confrontation and other non-democratic alternatives. The scenes of disorder and chaos and even destruction of public property associated with the functioning of our representative bodies, the reducing space for debate and discussion and the growing demonstration of intolerance towards opposite ideologies, and the spread of the politics of hatred do not serve the long-term interests of our polity or society. Our people's representative bodies at different levels should be concerned about it and endeavour to restore true democratic culture into their functioning. Intolerance and denial of rights of others are antithetical to democracy. To sustain people's faith in democracy, it is imperative for us to correct the prevailing image of disorder, intrigue, partisan and senseless confrontation, corruption and dishonesty associated with politics and democratic life in the country.

As Gandhiji had cautioned us, intolerance and democracy are incompatible with each other: 'Evolution of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the doors of reason when we refuse to listen to our opponents or, having listened, make fun of them. If intolerance becomes a habit, we run the risk of missing the truth.'

The growing sense of public disapproval of the manner in which our representative institutions are functioning should remind us of both the public anger as also of the need to apply correctives by everyone concerned. As a distinguished political analyst, Shri Inder Malhotra, puts it : 'Every matter, including the most trivial, is under disputation, so relentless and raucous, that governance of the vast country is becoming well nigh impossible...' Further, he stated, recently : '... winning elections by hook or by crook, has

become the be all and end all of the democratic process in India. That democracy also entails reasoned debate, tolerance of dissenting views and the eventual acceptance of the decision backed by the majority hasn't registered on the political class. For (many) it is enough to observe the form of democracy and let the substance take care of itself.'

The editorial comments in *The Tribune*, a reputed Newspaper, during the Monsoon Session of our Parliament, in last August, also merits mention here:

> The loss to the nation by the non-functioning of our parliamentarians runs into crores of rupees every year. And it is the taxpayers' money which goes down the drain. The nation suffers for this irresponsible behaviour of the MPs, who perhaps think that they have been elected to cause uproar and disrupt the proceedings. The rule of 'no work, no pay' should be applicable in their case if it applies to other salaried people, though this will not be enough punishment to the people's representatives...

These aberrations that are being talked about should not, however, lead us to conclude that parliamentary democracy has failed in the country or that it has become irrelevant today. We need to introspect and see how and why these developments, unacceptable to the people, are taking place and address the cause rather than target the institutions thoughtfully established and bequeathed to us by our Founding Fathers. We will not be helping the process of such corrections when irresponsible conduct by individuals and groups, who are otherwise part of one institution or the other, are projected as reflections on the decay of the institution they are associated with. Parliamentary democracy can be strengthened only if those who indulge in or abet in activities or behaviour incompatible with the established norms are made to account for such conduct individually or as groups, separating them from the institutions they happen to be associated with.

Bringing about integrity in our public life and in the political profession is an important issue before our country today. The perceived criminalisation of politics has vitiated our political system in a very regrettable manner. While the malaise of corruption has always been a major issue in our polity, what has brought the issue to the centrestage is the influence of money and muscle power in our electoral process and the resultant aberrations of politics. Degeneration of the electoral system, as a result of the illegal and immoral practices used for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity and contributing to the growing political apathy and cynicism among the people. We need to seriously ponder and address the issue of corruption, criminalisation and the communalisation of politics, the vicious role played by money and muscle power, inadequate

representation of women and, more significantly, the declining voter participation in the polls.

Since the issue of moral leadership remains critical to the process of consolidating democracy, the quality and ethical standards of the political leadership is taken as a measure in defining the values in society which are essentially enduring beliefs that influence attitudes, actions and choices we make as a people and as a nation. It is, therefore, imperative for us to have sound institutional mechanisms for containing corruption, strengthening accountability, promoting good governance, and thereby, enhancing the quality of democracy. The political parties and other stakeholders should come together to evolve a consensus on the ways and means to address this serious issue before our polity today.

Democratic societies are required to be open and transparent. The right to information, now statutorily recognized, should become a tool of grassroot empowerment, if not misused which would also work against corruption and exploitation. In fact, access to information is one of the keys to a successful democracy. Allowing people to seek and receive information on the basis of which public policies are taken, serves as a critical tool for fighting corruption, for enabling citizens to fully participate in public life, for making Governments more efficient, accountable and transparent. As it is said, it is in secret places that corruption thrives. The people have the right to know of the relevant facts relating to the decision-making processes of public institutions.

One of the institutions which can play an important role in strengthening democracy in the country today is the media. It is imperative for the media to function with a great sense of social responsibility, contributing positively towards enhancing the credibility of our democratic exercises and in a manner facilitating parliamentary democracy in the larger interest of the nation. They are expected to maintain a proper balance in reporting Parliament to the people, rather than restricting themselves only to criticism of the political processes and those in public life. Unfortunately, partisan politics is also influencing the media reporting and the dividing line between news and views is fast getting blurred. However, it will serve us well to remember that only in a democracy a free media thrives. Therefore, it should be the endeavour of the media also to ensure that cynicism does not pervade the minds of the people *vis-à-vis* our democratic experiments.

Another imperative for strengthening parliamentary democracy is to create conditions for secular politics to flourish unhindered in our country. We must ensure that religious considerations do not dictate our political activities. Secularism is not a luxury to be tolerated by the political class selectively, but is an essential quality to be promoted by the Indian State, if our national

unity and integrity are to be sustained. Intolerance, negativism, hatred and violence that have been generated in the country in the name of narrow, parochial, sectarian, religious and other divisive issues have greatly vitiated the political atmosphere in the country, causing to weaken national integration and inhibiting our development. Therefore, in our political discourses, we need to constantly strive to promote values of secularism and focus on issues which unite the nation than which divide it.

A modern and progressive education also plays a crucial role in strengthening our democratic edifice. An informed electorate is one of the most important keys to a successful and vibrant democracy. Only through education we can produce informed citizens and properly empower them. An educated citizenry will also be better equipped to make informed choices in the democratic processes as also to take prudent decisions that affect their lives and that of the nation as a whole. One of the principal reasons for the various initiatives for socio-economic development bypassing a significant segment of our population today is the lack of access to a quality education relevant to their requirements. Therefore, achieving universal education, laying special stress on vocational education and on the education of the girl child is an important challenge we need to address to broaden our democratic base. Democracy can be effectively strengthened only if we create conditions for an inclusive and modern social order, where the State should fight against the socially dangerous and outdated customs, superstitions and traditions and endeavour to bring social harmony and socio-political and economic stability for the people.

On another plane, the achievement of true democracy requires a balanced participation of men and women in our political life. Our democratic experiments will be incomplete when women who constitute half of the country's population are not adequately represented in the political decision-making processes at different levels. Despite numerous guarantees and safeguards, gender-discrimination and prejudice remain a distressing reality of our national life. Today, the challenge before us is to restore the true spirit of democracy by ensuring that the issues of gender-mainstreaming and gender-parity find a prominent place on our national agenda. Women's participation is integral to the process of broadening the democratic base as also for bringing in more inclusive development.

Democracy cannot be taken for granted and, therefore, all democratic institutions, especially the representative bodies, need to be nurtured constantly. It has to be ensured that these institutions are made more inclusive to ensure the participation of all sections of the people in the processes of governance.

Our Founding Fathers had a dream to make India a great nation within the shortest possible time. They had a vision for the whole country—an all-inclusive vision—and that was to provide all the people with the basic necessities of life and everything else that was required for a dignified existence. It is this commitment to provide for their necessities and a dignified existence that runs through the entire text of our Constitution. The Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy, the different organs of the State and their diverse institutions, functioning under the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances, are all intended to ensure these commitments.

Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab's observations while addressing the S.N.D.T. Women's University, Mumbai, in 1955 merits to be mentioned here:

> Indian independence is a unique event in the history of the world because it is not merely political independence but it has brought in its wake social equality also. It has given equal political rights to all sections of the society and to men and women. So far as the law and the Constitution go the ideal state has been reached, but the society has yet to be reconstituted in accordance with the law and the Constitution. That will require the determined work of a number of selfless enthusiastic workers. Otherwise, the ideal will remain only in the law of book and will not go further... . It is not enough, therefore, that the Constitution has given equal rights to man and woman. The provisions in the Constitution have to be brought into actual practice and the social structure must change accordingly.

We need to recognize the fact that India lives in her villages. Long term development of the country cannot be achieved without addressing the concerns of the rural sector, particularly the agricultural sector which constitute the backbone of our economy. City-centric development alone will not help in emancipating the substantial majority of our people, who live in our villages and who have not effectively benefited by the developmental initiatives of the past.

We need to strive hard to make our democracy relevant for large sections of our people. The negative public perception of politics and of those in public life should not be permitted to cloud the minds of the younger generations. Rather, they should be made to recognize that it is our collective and common responsibility to evolve ways and means to perfect our system of governance, rather than finding fault with it and running away from their responsibilities towards it. Ultimately, the people are the best sentinels of democracy.

Ordinary citizens of our country are at the centre of democracy. They have shown to the world their unquestionable capability and commitment to work a democratic system in the country. They are the ones who have brought about changes in the Government, with enormous sense of responsibility and uncanny wisdom, six out of fourteen times that we went through the General Elections— in most cases proving the political pundits and astrologers wrong.

We all should make more committed efforts to spread the principle of participatory democracy to every level of Government in the country—from the Village Panchayats, the Zila Parishads and the Municipalities to the State Legislatures and to the Parliament. Elections at every level entail an educative process for the voters and the voted and these lower echelons of democracy could be a good training ground for future parliamentarians.

I believe that strengthening parliamentary democracy is not a matter of choice before us; it is a necessity for us as a nation. Everyone recognizes that there is no better alternative to parliamentary democracy for our country. It is for all of us together to address the imperfections and shortcomings within the framework of the system. Since it is out of our Parliament that the leadership that runs the affairs of our country emerges, we have to ensure that political workers, specially, young men and women with commitment and dedication to the cause of the people, come into it and have the opportunity to actively participate in working the system which will have its due impact on the quality of living of the people. Ultimately, we need to recognize that strengthening parliamentary democracy is all about empowering the citizens in all possible ways. Only in the hands of a united and an eternally vigilant citizenry and a leadership committed to the cause of the people will our democracy be safe. A great responsibility is thus cast upon all of us in sustaining parliamentary democracy, our freedom and democratic rights, and, more than anything else, in sustaining our people's faith in the institutions of our democracy. If everyone discharges those responsibilities faithfully, nothing can ever undermine it.

Our endeavour should be to carry all sections of our people with us in the task of working a democratic system. The institutions of governance, particularly the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary, alongwith a watchful media, public-spirited civil service, and a vigilant civil society should all be collaborative partners in this national endeavour to strengthen parliamentary democracy. No institution should try, directly or indirectly, to undermine the strength of any other institution of our democracy. We must recognize that there is a symbiotic relationship between institutions of the State. There is no super-organ to control and dominate the others. If we do anything that could weaken one, its adverse consequences will be felt by the entire system.

In a plural society like India, the representative institutions are what late V.K. Krishna Menon called 'the safety valves' in the larger social system. It is through the forum of our Parliament that the commitment to democracy is best expressed in India and our most important democratic institutions must perform well. To my mind, democracy cannot be sustained unless everyone associated with its functioning demonstrates a democratic spirit. The essence of democracy is that public functionaries holding power in it wield that power in the name of the people. That power is expected to be used as an instrument to help bring about people's welfare and not as a means to dominate them. Democracy can be strengthened in the long run only if the citizens are able to identify themselves with its institutions and are given to feel that they exist to serve them and that they are ultimately accountable to them. We cannot afford to ignore the feelings and perceptions of the common man. His perception is the most important imponderable for the sustenance of a democratic polity. Winston Churchill stressed this point when he said: 'At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man walking into the little booth with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper. No amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussions can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of that point.'

Needless to reiterate, our Parliament itself has to be ever vigilant of the growing cynicism among our people about the way the institutions of our democracy function. It is on Parliament, more than on any other organ, that the responsibility for sustaining people's faith in democracy as the most sensitive system to the people's problems, rests. Therefore, the institutions collectively and the individual members, who constitute it, will have to function as role models for the society at large. As the Presiding Officer of the House of the People, I am acutely aware of this great responsibility.

Friends, parliamentary democracy cannot be strengthened by weakening any of its institutions. If any limb is weak, its impact will be felt by our whole body polity. Therefore, it should be the endeavour of all institutions and individuals associated with the system, as citizens, as voters, as representatives, as leaders, as administrators, as interpreters of laws, as purveyors of news and views, as intellectuals, as civil society activists, as advocacy groups and every segment of the society—to help strengthen the system in every possible way.

Our democratic experience reveals that in spite of numerous challenges we have been facing on various fronts, parliamentary democracy in our country has exhibited a rare resilience and vitality. But we have to acknowledge too that the problems before us are manifold. That being so, all stake-holders will have to unitedly work with dedication, commitment, cooperation and self-discipline to find lasting solutions to our problems so that we can

safeguard parliamentary democracy from the strains that it is experiencing today and further consolidate it in the coming years. That will be a befitting tribute to outstanding leaders like Harekrushna Mahtab who ceaselessly strove to strengthen parliamentary democracy in the country. Before I conclude, I would like to once again thank the Harekrushna Mahtab Foundation for according me this opportunity to share with this august gathering my views on the imperatives of strengthening parliamentary democracy in our country. I wish them all success in their endeavours towards the furtherance of the high ideals and ennobling values which Harekrushna Mahtab cherished all through his public life.

Thank you.

SUSTAINING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY: THE CHALLENGE OF THE TIMES*

It is indeed a matter of great honour and a privilege for me to be here to receive the Justice M.G. Ranade Award, instituted in the memory of Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, reputed freedom fighter, a progressive political thinker, distinguished jurist, renowned social reformer and an eminent educationist. It is with deep humility and a profound sense of obligation that I stand here today to receive this Award. I feel particularly honoured that the Award is being conferred on me by the National Social Conference which was established by Justice Ranade himself. I thank the jury and everyone associated with the National Social Conference, from the bottom of my heart, for conferring this honour on me.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. M.P. Mangudkar who has been at the helm of affairs of the National Social Conference for a decade. I am happy to know that under his guidance, the National Social Conference has been carrying forward the legacy of Justice Ranade by engaging itself in activities beneficial to the larger society. Its initiatives in holding meetings and seminars on important social issues like dowry and untouchability and endeavours in promoting the high ideals of secularism and liberalism are commendable. I wish the National Social Conference all the very best in all their endeavours in the larger interest of the society.

Justice M.G. Ranade was a great political thinker and religious and social reformer. He was one of the founders of the Indian National Congress; he also founded the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha. Inspired by the Brahmo Samaj, Justice Ranade espoused the principles of enlightened theism based on the Ancient Vedas. As founder of the Social Conference Movement, he devoted himself to the cause of social reforms, focusing on the problems of child marriage and the plight of widows. He fought against the evil of dowry system which was a curse, especially on the poor; he also laid great stress on widow remarriage and female literacy. A renowned Marathi scholar, he advocated the need for translation of standard English works into Marathi so that it could be read by many more people which, he felt, could help in spreading the concept of liberalism with its modern dimensions in India.

* While receiving the Justice M.G. Ranade Award 2007 conferred by the National Social Conference, Pune (16 February 2007).

Justice Ranade was also a renowned jurist who left the indelible imprint of his intellect on Indian jurisprudence. More than anything else, Justice Ranade has been acknowledged by many as the founder of 'Indian political economy', who, through his informed and analytical writings, 'challenged the universality of classical economics and its applicability to India under all circumstances'. While advocating India's development along modern lines, he also delineated a political economy of growth in which related fields like industry, agriculture, foreign trade and the role of the State were closely interlinked. Generations of Indian leaders have benefited from Justice Ranade's perceptive understanding of India's political economy. At the core of all his arguments was the imperative of making India a progressive, modern and self-reliant nation where equity and inclusiveness permeated all actions of the institutions of the State. More than a century after his death, Justice Ranade's profound understanding of our socio-political and economic realities remains a beacon for the national leadership. As we near the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of our Independence, it is only appropriate that we pay our homage to this outstanding statesman and introspect on our achievements and shortcomings in the last six decades.

In the wake of freedom, our Founding Fathers, inspired by the values of the freedom struggle, crafted a unique scheme of governance in which parliamentary democracy was cemented as the corner-stone of our constitutional edifice. They also amalgamated the principle of separation of powers with the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty in a manner underlining the primacy of the people in a democratic system and at the same time reinforcing the principle of constitutionalism.

No doubt, they were greatly influenced by the profound thinking of eminent leaders like Justice Ranade which was adequately reflected in the Constitution that we gave ourselves. Ranade's ideal of social equality and the welfare of the poor, the downtrodden and the weaker sections was very much reflected in our objectives of socio-economic development. The system of governance based on the principles of separation of powers among the organs of State was adopted keeping in mind the broader paradigm of speedy and comprehensive development of all sections of our people which we envisaged under the Constitution.

The fact that we have sustained the system of parliamentary democracy for all these years, may be with some imperfections, is definitely a matter of pride for all of us. Having come through fourteen General Elections which witnessed enthusiastic participation from our people, and having experienced a good degree of political stability for about five and a half decades, no one today will dispute that Indian democracy has come of age and that it is here to stay. This democratic consolidation, preserving and protecting the unity of

a heterogeneous country with one billion plus people, practising different religions, speaking innumerable languages, and home to a wide variety of cultures, customs and practices, has indeed been a remarkable achievement of post-Independent India.

Today, we take great pride in asserting ourselves as the largest working democracy in the world and this is as it should be. But, we have to introspect about the quality of democracy that we have achieved and see to what extent our democracy has made a difference to the lives of the common people. All of us realize that we still have a very long way to go in achieving our developmental potential and in fully consolidating the gains of six decades of democratic functioning.

While proudly claiming to be steadfastly proceeding towards an enviable double-digit growth rate, we cannot overlook the fact that a substantial section of our people still live below the poverty line. In the UNDPs developmental ranking, India still occupies an unenviable 127th position. Growing instances of social tension across the country and the disturbing indications of frustration and helplessness experienced by our farming community are issues that should engage the attention of the whole country, particularly of all those associated with the institutions of governance at different levels today. Compounding such tension on the socio-economic fronts is the not so encouraging political scenario in the country. We have to admit that we have not been able to realize the full potential of democratic governance to the benefit of all our people in the past six decades. If we do not succeed in addressing the concerns of the people, there is a great risk that they will lose faith in democracy as a viable system capable of meeting their expectations.

Today the sanctity of our democratic processes and institutions is being compromised in different ways. The visible intrusion of divisive forces into the political arena, the recurring scenes of disorder and chaos and at times even destruction, associated with the functioning of our representative bodies, the reducing space for debate and discussion and the growing demonstration of intolerance towards opposite ideologies, and the spread of the politics of hatred are seriously vitiating the democratic culture in our country contributing in turn to growing public cynicism about the efficacy of democracy in addressing the concerns of the people. Added to this is the attempt by some institutions to malign and marginalize important people's fora with an intent to occupy larger space than what is ideally feasible in a representative democratic system.

All institutions of governance, particularly our people's representative bodies, at different levels, should be concerned about it and endeavour to restore true democratic culture and the spirit of constitutionalism into their functioning. As Gandhiji had cautioned us, democracy can flourish only in

an atmosphere of tolerance: 'Evolution of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the doors of reason when we refuse to listen to our opponents or, having listened, make fun of them. If intolerance becomes a habit, we run the risk of missing the truth.' To restore people's faith in democracy, it is, therefore, imperative for us to correct the prevailing image of disorder, divisiveness, intrigue, partisan and senseless confrontation, corruption and dishonesty associated with some areas of our political and democratic life.

It is axiomatic to say that each organ of the State—the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Executive—is required to function in conformity with the constitutional mandate. As the supreme representative and law-making body, the Legislature has been accorded a pre-eminent position in our constitutional and political set-up. The power to make laws, its control over the nation's purse, the Executive being made accountable to the popular House, its role in the election and impeachment of the Head of State as well as in the removal of incumbents of high constitutional offices, including those of the higher Judiciary, its constituent powers, and its powers during an emergency, testify to such pre-eminence. Of course, even the Legislature has to function within the confines as laid down by the Constitution.

While delineating the powers of every organ, the Constitution also visualized that each of them would work in harmony with the other and only in the larger public good. The framers of our Constitution took utmost care to provide for an independent and impartial Judiciary, as an interpreter of the Constitution and as the custodian of the rights of the citizens. However, they envisioned that the courts too have the mandate only to interpret the laws and not to enter into a discussion as to what the law should be nor to lay down general norms of behaviour for the government and the people to be considered binding on all as the law of the land. The scope of judicial review thus is confined to see whether an impugned legislation falls within the competence of the Legislature or is consistent with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution and its other basic features.

As per the constitutional provisions, the Parliament and State Legislatures show the highest respect and regard for the judicial body. The rules of procedure of the Parliament ensure that the image of the Judiciary is not tarnished in any way by any action of our Legislative Bodies. In fact, there has always been a consensus among the community of parliamentarians to strike a balance among the various organs of State so as to enhance the prestige and dignity of the institutions of our polity. If the institutions of governance do not respect each other eventually our people will lose faith in all of them.

The supremacy of the Constitution, parliamentary democracy, the principle of separation of powers, the independence of the Judiciary and the limited amending powers of Parliament have been spelt out, at different times, as among the basic features of the Constitution. What is important in this context is that all organs of State have to judiciously look at different perceptions of specific issues and ensure that the constitutional mandate is not violated and that ultimately all laws exist for the people rather than the other way around. They also have to make efforts to strengthen the linkages between the different organs as otherwise, the stability of the entire edifice of our democratic structure would be in jeopardy.

To my mind, the Rule of Law is at the very core of our Constitution. It should permeate the way in which we are governed. It requires that those who exercise powers should be conditioned by law and not be allowed to act in an arbitrary or unlawful manner so that the people can obtain the protection of law as and when required. It is only to guard against the abuse of powers that a constitutional structure of power-relationship with checks and balances was devised and safeguards provided for under our Constitution, whether expressly or by implication.

In this context, one cannot avoid inviting attention to a matter which pertains to what is called 'judicial activism' which has gained ground in recent years, eliciting both admiration and criticism from various quarters. One will acknowledge the contribution made by our Judiciary in providing justice through the innovative system of Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to the oppressed citizens, especially those belonging to the vulnerable sections who have no means, no facilities and, in fact, no possibility on their own to approach the court even in cases of glaring injustice and discrimination. But, we have travelled a long way from that laudable objective. On many occasions, the Supreme Court itself has felt it necessary to condemn motivated and frivolous approaches to Court in the garb of PIL.

There is a feeling that in this process there is not only proliferation of cases but also near obliteration of the contours of the specific jurisdictions of the different organs of the State for which the doctrine of separation of powers has been clearly enshrined in our Constitution. Such assumption of jurisdiction at times inhibits many well-meaning executive authorities from discharging their functions according to their judgment and obligation.

At times, judicial interventions burden on discharging executive and legislative functions, which cannot be called into question by anybody, if they are decided by the Apex Court and have to be enforced in spite of their undesirability from the point of view of those who are entrusted with the duty to make laws as also of those expected to give effect to them and

inspite of being against the scheme of the Constitution itself. To my mind, it would be desirable if no organ of the State, in the name of public good, enters into the arenas specifically earmarked for others by the Constitution. With all humility, one can say that there should be no assumption that any particular organ has a monopoly of concern for the people. Such a notion in itself is undemocratic and against the accepted cannons of constitutionalism. Ideally Rule of Law has to be enforced only by diligently and effectively discharging each one's assigned responsibilities in harmonious relationship in the larger public good.

Another issue of concern to all well-meaning people in the country, of late, has been the emergence of divisive forces on the national political scene. In a plural society like ours, it should be the concern of all to strive for and promote the feeling of oneness and unity among the diverse sections of our people. Maintenance of a secular social order assumes special significance here. Justice Ranade who was a great votary of liberalism wrote prophetically:

> The spirit of liberalism implies a freedom from race and creed prejudices and a steady devotion to all that seeks to do justice between man and man, giving to the rulers the loyalty that is due to the law they are bound to administer, but securing at the same time to the ruled the equality which is their right under the law.

Secularism is an essential quality to be promoted by the Indian State and all other stake-holders in our democratic functioning, if our national unity and integrity are to be sustained. We need to constantly highlight issues which unite the nation than which divide it, so that we could develop with our united strength and without wasting our national energies on trivialities and channelise them effectively for the common good.

Democracy cannot be complete as also inclusive without the effective participation of women who constitute one-half of our population, a cause on which Justice Ranade laid great emphasis all through his lifetime. While universal adult suffrage has enfranchised them, what is needed is to create conditions to enable them to participate in the democratic processes in a more purposive and dignified manner. Today, there is a growing realisation that empowerment of women cannot be achieved by ensuring their representation at the lower levels of our democratic institutions alone. To make it truly effective, we need to provide for their participation in the higher levels of representation as well. A recognition of and commitment to the pivotal role of women in our political and decision-making processes, thus, is another positive trend in contemporary Indian democracy.

Friends, among large sections of our people today, there is widespread disillusionment with the content and quality of our political discourse. More than ever before, people, especially the younger generations, are clamouring

for more transparency, probity and good governance from our leaders and political parties. It is important that our institutions of democracy, particularly our leaders recognize these genuine apprehensions and frustrations of our people and seek to address them. The leadership has to be proactive and pragmatic at once, responding to the demands of the times. With the right to information having become a viable tool in the hands of our people, the expectations are bound to rise. All stakeholders, especially the institutions of the State, political parties, the media, the academia and the civil society groups, together will have to necessarily take appropriate measures to address these challenges before our polity today.

The foundations of our democracy can be strengthened only when every institution that constitutes our governance structure performs at its best keeping the interest of the people and the country in mind and in conformity with the fundamental law of the land, our Constitution. The Executive has to be seen to be functioning to address the concerns of the people, the Legislature reflecting the urges and aspirations of the people and the larger national causes as opposed to narrow partisan politics and the Judiciary as an independent arbiter dispensing speedy and inexpensive justice to every section of the people, remaining within the ambit of the scheme of the Constitution. It is also expected of the media, the intellectuals and the civil society groups to help in consolidating the gains of freedom and to enhance the credibility of our democratic life.

Everyone should work as collaborative partners in this national endeavour. No institution should try, directly or indirectly, to undermine the strength of any other institution. We must recognize that there is a symbiotic relationship between institutions of the State. There is no super-organ to control and dominate the others. If we do anything that could weaken one, its adverse consequences will be felt by the entire system. It was with that spirit of cooperation and unity that our Founding Fathers like Justice Ranade worked for our freedom and for the establishment of a democratic order in the country.

In these uncertain and tumultuous times, we can draw inspiration from the vision of India as delineated by Justice Ranade more than a century ago:

> With a liberated manhood, with buoyant hope, with a faith that never shirks duty, with a sense of justice that deals fairly with all, with unclouded intellect and powers fully cultivated and, lastly, with a love that overleaps all bounds, renovated India will take her proper rank among the nations of the world, and be master of the situation and of her own destiny. This is the goal to be reached—this is the promised land. Happy are they who see it in distant vision, happier they who are permitted to work and clear the way on to it, happiest they who live to see it with their own eyes and tread upon the holy soil.

It is such profound and prophetic words which should remain our beacon at all times. Justice Ranade was, undoubtedly, among those who had such great vision about India, but did not live to see it unfolding in a free India while it is our good fortune to see the signs of emergence of a resurgent India today. But what is important is to ensure that we do not leave anyone behind in the process of realizing that vision, but take everyone along and help realize and actually experience the fruits of those dreams. With these words, I once again thank Dr. M.P. Mangudkar and all others associated with this function in having given me this opportunity to be in the midst of this august audience. I am honoured by the choice that you have made, and I receive this Award instituted in memory of Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade with the utmost humility.

Thank you.

DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION SINCE INDEPENDENCE*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver the First Lecture organized in honour of Acharya J.B. Kripalani, one of the tallest leaders of our freedom movement who passed away in 1982. An idealist, a revered academician, eminent parliamentarian, crusader for social justice and a staunch votary of value-based politics in the country, Acharya Kripalani was indeed a multi-faceted personality. I pay my respectful homage to his memory and wish to compliment the Trust named after him for organising this Lecture Series.

Friends, Acharya Kripalani had abiding faith in and unwavering commitment to the cause of parliamentary democracy and socio-economic justice to the teeming millions of our country. He was a devout Gandhian, valiant freedom fighter and a committed socialist. A well-known academician, he was associated with the Banaras Hindu University as a Professor of Political Science and later served as the Principal of the Gujarat Vidyapith, a well-known institution for imparting value-based education to its students, which was founded by Gandhiji. Here he came to be known as the 'Acharya' and Gandhiji fondly called him 'Professor' and he entrusted him with the responsibility of implementing his constructive programmes, particularly those relating to communal harmony, removal of untouchability, promotion of Khadi, rural development and education.

An eminent parliamentarian, Acharya Kripalani was a political leader of unimpeachable integrity and fierce independence. A resolute and articulate advocate of democratic and parliamentary form of governance, he served the country as a member of the Constituent Assembly, and was entrusted with the responsibility of the Chairmanship of the very important Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights. He was elected to the Lok Sabha four times, and he consistently declined to accept any ministerial post. Kripalaniji would forever be remembered for his courage of conviction and service to the people.

Acharya Kripalani devoted his entire life to the cause of the common people and for the promotion of democratic values and norms in the country.

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* At the First Acharya Kripalani Memorial Lecture on *Sixty Years of Independence and Democratic Consolidation in India*, New Delhi (17 March 2007).

As we are moving towards the Diamond Jubilee of our Freedom and observing the 25th Anniversary of the passing away of one of the nation's great leaders, it is as a tribute to the memory of Kripalaniji that I have chosen to speak on the theme 'Sixty Years of Independence and Democratic Consolidation in India', before this august gathering today.

From the very beginning, the basic objective of the leaders of our freedom movement was the establishment of a democratic political order recognizing the Fundamental Rights of the people, which will ensure social and economic emancipation of the people, having just gained their freedom from slavery under foreign rule. Our Founding Fathers while framing the country's Constitution opted for a parliamentary democratic system based on universal adult franchise, which will promote the well-being, and raise the standard of life and provide decent living to the common man through the setting up of an egalitarian society. Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, one of the leading members of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution said that '... a labourer, a cultivator or a tenant ... (can be) expected to know what his interests are and to choose his representatives.' Through the past six decades, our people have proven time and again that they are capable of meeting the demands of a democratic system.

The Constitution provides that the fundamental social and political objectives of free India was to be achieved in a democratic manner, through the parliamentary form of governance, a multi-party system, free and fair elections, an independent Judiciary, a vigilant and responsible media, and an alert civil society striving for the common national weal.

The First General Elections of 1952 was the biggest free electoral exercise known till then anywhere in the world. As against 35 million voters in the election to the Provincial Legislative Assemblies that elected the members of the Constituent Assembly, the 1952 Elections saw 176 million voters. Today our democratic exercise involves over 700 million people. We have successfully come through Fourteen General Elections, and numerous elections to the State Assemblies and local bodies, and after experimenting with fairly stable Governments and political life, our people have proved that democracy is well-established in the country and that there is no substitute for the same. Today, the poor and the rich, the illiterate and the literate, the farmer and the professional, are all entitled to participate in our democratic political system. Going by the number of political parties represented in Parliament and by the wider socio-economic and occupational background of the members elected to the Houses, it is clear that the Parliament has become more and more representative of a larger cross-section of our society, thereby enhancing its legitimacy and importance.

Our people have shown to the world their unquestionable capability and commitment to work a democratic system in the country; and when they felt necessary to bring about changes in the Government, with enormous sense of responsibility and uncanny wisdom, as happened in six out of fourteen times that we went through the General Elections—in most cases, proving the political pundits and astrologers wrong. In fact, every succeeding election has reflected a deeper commitment of our people to parliamentary democracy.

In the last six decades of freedom, no doubt, we have made remarkable progress in almost all areas of national life. On the economic front, we have made significant strides taking a substantial segment of our people from below the poverty line to a level of dignified existence. Our planned efforts of the last five decades have helped us, to a considerable extent, in mitigating the privations of the colonial era and in building India into a nation of considerable economic strength within the framework of democracy, federalism and a policy of self-reliance. Our achievements in the field of IT and our extremely talented human resources are areas about which we can be proud. There is today a sea change not only in the world's perception about India's future but also in our own perception about ourselves. The world is beginning to acknowledge India as a significant player in the world economy.

On the social front also we have noticeable achievements to our credit. Over the years, with effective State intervention, we have striven, with varying degrees of success, to address the issue of the political, social and economic exclusion of a sizeable segment of our population and of their empowerment by bringing them into our national mainstream. We sought to achieve these seemingly impossible tasks, precipitated by historical forces, by taking recourse to progressive legislation and by adopting a policy of protective discrimination.

Several progressive legislations that independent India adopted with a view to bringing about social change, to provide for comprehensive land reforms, to help provide just and humane conditions of work, to provide protection to women against violence, to broaden the base of democracy and for the increased participation of women in politics, to regulate the practice of dowry, to safeguard the vulnerable sections against social discrimination and violence and atrocities, to check the practice of child marriages, to prevent child labour, to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of our society, to ensure rural employment and thereby to address rural poverty, to ensure access of citizens to information having a bearing on policy and administration, among others, have all significantly contributed to the process of democratic consolidation in the country. No doubt, there is a need to give more thrust to the enforcement of existing laws, in several areas.

The passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to our Constitution, which is a step towards giving true meaning and content to the Panchayati Raj System and thereby for effective decentralization of power, has created a new horizon for participatory democracy and social transformation in the country. Through this the people now have an opportunity to raise their voice and have a direct role in the developmental process. The greatest benefits which local self-governance offers to the people, to my mind, is that a large number of women, dalits and other marginalised classes have come to be part of the processes of decision-making and thus of the governance structure itself. However, this process will remain incomplete if the benefit of increased women's representation in elected bodies is not extended to the State and the National levels also.

Friends, a parliamentary polity is a constantly evolving one. It is dynamic, and keeps on developing to suit the changing needs, newer aspirations and hopes of the people, and that is its greatest advantage. Today we can legitimately take pride in adapting our institutions to the specificities of the Indian situation and, in the process, developing many unique practices, rules and customs of our own.

Democratic institution-building needs to be sustained by everyone associated with it. We need to develop a healthy political culture in the country. The leaders of all the political parties have the most crucial role in it. They are expected to be role-models for the people. The image of intrigue, venality, disorder and anarchy, that the people are associating with politics and public life in the country today needs to be corrected urgently, so that our people begin to view politics as a respectable profession in the service of the society as was perceived during the long years of our struggle for freedom. There is an imperative need for effective political polarisation around issues that are vital to all the classes and categories of our diverse population, rather than around personalities, and emotive and divisive issues.

The political parties, as the medium of political mobilization, have to be fully alive to the perils of confrontational and divisive politics, politics of exclusion, corrupt practices in the political arena and all forms of corruption, and then only can such detrimental tendencies be substantially checked. Taking recourse to illegal and immoral practices and to money power and muscle power for winning elections by some sections have led to the considerable degeneration of the sanctity of the electoral system and the erosion of the true representative and democratic character of our polity. As Dr. Ambedkar said: 'The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislatures, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs depend are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics.'

To consolidate our system of governance, all constitutional bodies and institutions should function in harmony and in conformity with the fundamental law of the land. The Legislature must reflect the urges and aspirations of the people and the larger national causes as opposed to narrow partisan politics, the Executive should effectively and successfully address the concerns of the people, and the Judiciary, as an independent arbiter, must dispense speedy and inexpensive justice to every section of our society. If these organs of State operate according to the constitutional mandate, the scope for conflict in the exercise of powers and privileges will be minimal.

Our Founding Fathers had visualized that our legislative bodies should articulate social and economic issues and formulate policies after deliberation and debate in a manner consistent with the constitutional obligations and maintaining the dignity and decorum of the elected bodies. But, unfortunately, there is a justified feeling among the people that over the years there has been a decline in the standards of our representative bodies. Debates and discussions, the hallmarks of democracy, are being over-shadowed by disruption, confrontation and other non-democratic alternatives. The scenes of disorder and chaos and even destruction of public property associated with the functioning of our representative bodies, the reducing space for debate and discussion and the growing demonstration of intolerance towards opposite ideologies, and the spread of the politics of hatred, do not serve the long-term interests of our polity or society. Our representative institutions should be greatly concerned about the growing scepticism and cynicism among our people about the efficacy of democracy and endeavour to restore the true democratic culture. Intolerance and denial of rights of others are antithetical to democracy. We all need to remind ourselves, time and again, that democracy is a system based on dialogue and debate and on people's confidence. It can thrive only if everyone involved demonstrates the spirit of tolerance, dignified behaviour and an unconditional commitment to submit oneself to the norms of sound democratic practices.

The legislators in our country have the special responsibility of respecting adequately and faithfully the verdict of the people who are the real masters in a democracy. If they are perceived to be self-seekers and unconcerned about the discharge of their responsibility, the people, specially the youth, will lose faith in the system as a whole.

Unfortunately, of late, I am getting a feeling that many of our well-conceived parliamentary devices are considered to be dispensable luxuries for our system. Devices like the Question Hour are seen by some sections in Parliament and Legislatures to be totally avoidable democratic extravaganzas. It was thoughtfully introduced into the Constitution and the parliamentary practice and procedures, as an important mechanism, to hold the Executive

accountable to the people through their representatives. Often some sections prefer the adjournment of the House and thereby the denial of an opportunity to present and discuss people's problems before the Parliament and through it before the Government rather than subscribe to the established and accepted norms of parliamentary functioning. As a distinguished columnist, Shri Inder Malhotra stated in anguish recently: 'The flip side of these distant memories (*of the finest parliamentary traditions of the early years of the Republic*) is the misfortune to have to watch and comment on the consistent, persistent and pernicious decline in parliamentary behaviour, and thus of Parliament's dignity, authority and prestige. Sadly, if things go on deteriorating, as they are, Parliament, the centre-piece of this country's democratic institutions, could become dysfunctional.'

The institution must function in a civilized and dignified manner. It is important for everyone interested in sustaining democracy in the country to bear in mind that democratic consolidation cannot be realized by undermining institutions which are integral to it.

A great deal of responsibility lies on the media. It is expected to be fair, free and authentic in its coverage of issues, events and individuals. They would do well to ensure the trust of the people in our representative bodies. More importantly, they must ensure that the democratic institutions are projected to the people at large in such a manner which reinforces people's faith in our parliamentary system. An independent Judiciary and a free Press are at once a product as also a symbol of a democratic society. We all know how they have flourished in India since Independence. They draw strength from the system as also infuse strength into the system. They are meant to reinforce one another. The recent comments by one of the most respected members of the Fourth Estate, Shri Kuldip Nayar, merits to be mentioned here: Highlighting the importance of giving due space to the Parliament in the media, he said, what everybody should ponder:

> Serious stories which include the parliamentary proceedings, do not make the grade (for the media). The media has come to believe that people do not want to read anything which makes them think. Today, the print media is suffering from a mad disease which has played havoc with our newspapers. It is the tabloid syndrome. ...

While recognizing that over the past six decades of freedom and democracy we have made significant strides on the socio-economic and the political fronts, we also have to admit our non-achievements in several areas which have resulted in depriving substantial sections of our people of the benefit of a healthy and dignified existence. In fact, the consolidation of social, economic and political democracy has been one of the cardinal concerns

of the Founding Fathers of our Constitution, and they wanted that prosperity should reach all sections of our people in all parts of our country.

We should all ponder that UNDP's Human Development Report of 2004 has ranked India at the 127th position. We cannot absolve ourselves of our failures in achieving the desired level of empowerment of the socially and economically backward sections. Caste-based social stratification is a reality we have not been able to address in six decades of freedom. Similarly, gender-based discrimination is yet another major crucial social issue we have failed in addressing. Our women who constitute almost fifty per cent of our population should have an effective share in the political decision-making processes, especially in our representative institutions; they should receive the full benefit of education. We cannot wait longer to provide drinking water, good medical care, good road connectivity and other basic infrastructure to all our villages. The information and communications technologies have no relevance to thousands of our villages where there is no electricity and telephones. We are yet to cleanse our system of the cancer of corruption and provide jobs to the millions of unemployed in our country. The question of mass poverty is still staring at the conscience of free India today with over 350 millions of our citizens still living below the poverty line. Freedom has no meaning for all those unfortunate citizens who still live unsure of their next square meal.

These are the major unfulfilled promises of our freedom for our people today. These are the challenges that our political leadership and the civil society will have to address together. It is imperative that we pool in all our national assets and our collective strength with determination to address the genuine people's problems rather than seeking to play around with emotive issues and distract the people's attention from their genuine problems.

We must recognize that democracy is not all about periodic elections and the political rights alone. It is fundamentally about providing for the basic needs of the people. It is time we began to lay greater attention on the substance of democracy and that is about the positive impact it makes on the lives of the people. 'Health for all, education for all, home for all, jobs for all and security for all' should be the end results of democracy, which can be achieved only when the political and economic power are properly disbursed and the right atmosphere for distributive justice prevails in the country.

Growing instances of social tension across the country and the disturbing indications of frustration and helplessness experienced by our farming and the rural community are issues that should engage the attention of the whole country, particularly of all those associated with the institutions of governance at different levels today. If we do not succeed in addressing the

concerns of the people, there is a great risk that they will lose faith in democracy as a viable system capable of meeting their expectations.

Compounding such tension on the socio-economic fronts is the not so encouraging political scenario in the country. Today the sanctity of our democratic processes and institutions are being compromised in different ways. The visible intrusion of divisive forces into the political arena and the prevailing atmosphere of negative politics are seriously vitiating the democratic culture in our country. Added to this is the attempt by some institutions to malign and marginalize important people's fora with an intent to occupy larger space than what is ideally feasible in a representative democratic system. All institutions of governance, particularly our people's representative bodies, at different levels, should be concerned about it and endeavour to restore true democratic culture and the spirit of constitutionalism into their functioning. As Gandhiji had cautioned us, democracy can flourish only in an atmosphere of tolerance.

A matter of great concern today, is the issue of social cohesion and of the need to bring about what Pandit Nehru called 'the emotional integration' of our people. So much of intolerance, negativism, hatred and violence is generated in the country in the name of narrow, parochial, sectarian, religious and other divisive issues. Communalism is one of the greatest dangers facing us today. This was an issue our Founding Fathers were most worried about in the wake of freedom. They had, time and again, warned of the dangers of disunity in the country. Stressing the need to have a larger vision for the country, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had exhorted the people thus: '... narrow mindedness means pettiness and density of mind and refusal to accept higher, nobler and purer thoughts ... .With such small minds we cannot aspire to be a great nation in the world.' We should not forget that plurality is a basic attribute of the Indian society which has to be nurtured if India as a nation has to survive. Plurality is best served and sustained only in a parliamentary democratic set up.

Every citizen of our country should be made to feel that he or she is an important part of our democratic functioning and has a role in strengthening the system of parliamentary democracy. Transparency and probity should permeate the functioning of each and every organ and authority in the country. Corruption, in all its forms, has to be fought relentlessly and weeded out. Functionaries associated with the institutions at different levels be they part of the Executive or Legislature or the Judiciary have to demonstrate exemplary behaviour.

Acharya Kripalani was one leader who personally launched a crusade against corruption. In fact, he went to the extent of stressing that he was

obsessed with corruption because, according to him, 'corruption leads to injustice and inefficiency'. While speaking on corruption, Kripalaniji once observed: 'Corruption in administration has its moral impact on the whole community. It has the tendency of turning the average citizen dishonest. This is dangerous....(and) greatly impairs administrative efficiency.'

There are many other areas where we still need to devote our attention. We have to ensure at any cost that Rule of Law prevails and equal justice is meted out to all throughout the country. Gandhiji had said: 'My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest'. It is of crucial importance for the people to have a speedy and effective justice delivery system. We need to take effective steps to facilitate access to the higher Judiciary for the common people. If due access to the doors of higher judiciary is denied to the poor and the socially disadvantaged, the people's faith in the institutions of our democracy will be undermined. As the eminent jurist. M.C. Chagla stated: 'If sections of society are deprived of the benefits of law and are treated as second class citizens, or if the law does not protect the liberty of the individual, then it would be meaningless to say that the Rule of Law prevails.'

Today a major part of our population as also most members of our Parliament belong to the post-Independence generation. It is important for them to remember that great sacrifices of generations before them had gone into our struggle for freedom and in laying the institutional foundations of our Republic. We should not undermine their importance by promoting hatred, negativism and divisiveness among our people and by weakening our institutions of governance. Today it is imperative to isolate forces that are working to undermine our freedom and the values that guided the great freedom movement. We have to ponder seriously about the dangers of the polity being fractured by issues and objectives other than those based on principles and inclusiveness.

Dr. Ambedkar's observations towards the end of the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly remain valid today as they were then: 'If we wish to preserve the Constitution in which we have sought to enshrine the principle of Government of the people, for the people and by the people, let us resolve not to be tardy in the recognition of the evils that lie across our path...'

Friends, we have a vested interest in making democracy succeed in all its true manifestations so that tyranny does not overtake it. If democracy has to be sustained in the country on a lasting basis, the imperative of strengthening democratic institutions by identifying and curbing all the negative tendencies causing erosion in democratic values have to be recognized by all. Democratic consolidation is not a one time process—it is a continuous

one. That process can be meaningfully sustained only through the committed endeavours of all sections of our polity. Everyone should seek to strengthen our institutions. Those associated with the institutions at different levels, particularly our people's representatives have a greater responsibility in this. They shall not indulge in anything that could cause to undermine our people's faith in the democratic system.

We all need to bear in mind that eternal vigilance is the price that the citizens have to pay for guarding democracy and freedom. The commitment of the common people is our greatest asset and the continuing guarantee for our democratic functioning. Whatever positions we hold, wherever we are placed, rather than shying away from our responsibilities, we all have to play a key role in the furtherance of our democratic institutions and processes. That will be a befitting tribute to outstanding leaders like Acharya Kripalani who untiringly strove throughout their life towards democratic consolidation in the country. Before I conclude, I would like to once again thank the Acharya Kripalani Memorial Trust for according me this opportunity to share with this august gathering my views on sixty years of Independence and imperatives of democratic consolidation in our country. I wish them all success in all their endeavours towards the furtherance of Acharya Kripalani's philosophy and his lofty ideals.

Thank you.

CHALLENGES BEFORE THE PRESIDING OFFICERS*

It is a matter of great pleasure and also an honour for me to be here with you all at the 72nd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India. This is the second time that the Kerala Legislative Assembly is hosting this Conference at Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala, which was the venue of our Conference in 1968 as well. I understand the then Travancore-Cochin Assembly also had hosted a Conference in 1951. I convey my thanks to the Hon'ble Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly for his gracious offer to host the Conference in this beautiful city and for making impeccable arrangements.

Kerala is one of the most idyllic States of India. Apart from being the land of breathtaking beauty and lush greenery, Kerala has many reasons to take pride in its varied achievements. It ranks the highest among the States in the country's Human Development Index. While the rest of the country is striving to improve literacy rates and sex ratio, Kerala has been able to achieve the enviable literacy rate of near hundred per cent and a positive sex ratio of 1058. In the health care infrastructure, Kerala is today among the front ranking States of the country with its indicators competing very favourably with many of the most developed countries. The dedicated and industrious people of Kerala have set high benchmark in diverse fields of their activities making the State politically, economically and culturally advanced.

I have had opportunities of visiting Kerala on a few occasions after I assumed the Office of the Speaker of Lok Sabha and I am very happy to be here again today. I am delighted to see this Conference taking place in this impressive new Assembly Complex. Some of our State Legislative Assemblies, including Kerala, are celebrating their Golden Jubilee this year. I extend my greetings and good wishes to all of them.

Referred to by Mahatma Gandhi as the 'Evergreen City of India', Thiruvananthapuram is characterized by its undulating terrain of low coastal hills, long shoreline, beautiful beaches, backwater stretches and busy commercial thoroughfares. Effectively blending modernity and tradition, the city is also a centre of research and development for space science, information technology, bio-technology, medicine, particularly our traditional systems like

* At the Inauguration of the 72nd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, Thiruvananthapuram (25 May 2007).

the Ayurveda, amongst other subjects. Today, it is one of the major destinations for medical tourists. I am happy that we are meeting in such a vibrant and dynamic city for this important Conference.

Friends, a little while ago we made a reference to the passing away of some of our esteemed colleagues, who had belonged to the family of Presiding Officers. I pay my respectful homage to their memory.

After the Raipur Conference held in November 2005, our family has been joined by as many as 21 distinguished Presiding Officers. I extend a hearty welcome to each one of them on their joining our fraternity. I also place on record our deep appreciation of the valuable contributions made to our Conferences by the former Presiding Officers of different Assemblies.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not mention that Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, as Speaker of West Bengal Assembly is attending our Conference for 25 years consecutively and I wish to convey my sincere felicitations to him for his unique record which has no parallel nor will have in future, as I reckon. Shri Halim has made signal contribution to the strengthening of parliamentary democracy in our country. We are proud that today he is the Chairman of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and has brought about significant changes in its functioning as a cohesive unit. I am sure all of you will join me in conveying our warmest felicitations on his achieving a milestone and in wishing him many more years of sterling service towards the consolidation of our democratic structure.

Soon after the Raipur Conference, we had met in February 2006 in New Delhi for an Emergency Conference which was necessitated by the initiation of judicial proceedings by some former members of Parliament, challenging their expulsion from the membership of the House due to their improper conduct of accepting money for asking questions in the House.

You may recall that on 23 December 2005, ten members involved in what is known as the 'cash for query' case were expelled from the membership of the Lok Sabha as their conduct was unbecoming of members of Parliament. The matter was investigated into by a Committee consisting of members from all sections of the House. I constituted the Committee after consulting Leaders of Parties in Lok Sabha. Based on the recommendations of the Committee, a motion to expel the members was moved by the Hon'ble Leader of the House and adopted by the House. As mentioned earlier, those former members then filed writ petitions in the Supreme Court challenging their expulsion.

The Supreme Court reportedly directed that notices be issued to the parties including the Speaker, Lok Sabha. I, however, decided that the

Secretariat would not accept any such notice, far less respond to the same as in my view the issue was non-justiciable, as the Constitution provides, *inter alia*, that votes given by hon'ble members cannot be questioned in any judicial proceedings and that the House had full right and authority to deal with all matters regarding discipline and misconduct of the members. In this connection, I convened a meeting of the Leaders of Parties in Lok Sabha on 20 January 2006 to discuss the issues relating to and arising out of the said proceedings. Two eminent lawyers of our country, Shri Fali S. Nariman and Shri T.R. Andhyarujina also attended the meeting on my invitation. I had made a Statement in the Lok Sabha on 17 February 2006, informing the House of these developments.

This was also the subject matter of discussion at the Emergency Conference of Presiding Officers held in New Delhi on 4 February 2006. Both the All Party Meeting of the Leaders as well as the Emergency Conference of the Presiding Officers, unanimously supported the decision taken by me not to accept or respond to the notices issued by the Courts of Law in the matter of expulsion of the members of the two Houses of our Parliament.

You are aware that the Hon'ble Supreme Court has dismissed the petitions filed by the expelled members and has upheld the right of the Legislatures to take disciplinary action against the members, but has also observed that in some given areas, the Courts may intervene, with the decisions of the Legislature, which have raised some doubts and concern. I hope no such occasion will ever arise. However, we may discuss the issue objectively in the context of the relevant provisions of our Constitution.

In December 2005, a news item was telecast in the electronic media that four members of Parliament were indulging in improper conduct in the matter of implementation of MPLAD Scheme in their respective areas. On 20 December 2005, I referred to this news item in the House and after discussing the matter with the Leaders of different parties, later in the day, I announced the constitution of an Inquiry committee consisting of seven members, representing major parties, to probe into the matter. I also requested the members concerned not to attend the House until the issue was looked into and a decision was taken. The Committee submitted its report on 13 March 2006, wherein it was held that the conduct of the four members, whose cases had been referred to the Committee, was not above board and 'they need to be handed out appropriate punishment'. The Committee recommended that the period of abstention of the concerned members from the sittings of the House, under the direction of the Speaker, should be deemed to be their suspension from the membership of the House and that they should be reprimanded and their membership should be suspended till 22 March 2006. The House unanimously accepted these recommendations.

The Committee further recommended that the Union Government might suitably revise the guidelines governing MPLADS with a view to plug various loopholes and lacunae.

I must also make a reference to another very unfortunate development. Recently, some members of Lok Sabha have been accused of being involved in 'human trafficking' and if they are found guilty, it would greatly tarnish the prestige and image of the supreme representative institution of the land. I mentioned the matter in the Lok Sabha on 26 April 2007 after discussing with the hon'ble Leaders of different parties and they unanimously agreed that the House should not only express its concern but should also condemn the commission of the alleged offence by the member of this august House. Accordingly, on behalf of the House and on my behalf as the Presiding Officer, I strongly disapproved the conduct of the member concerned and condemned the same. In the circumstances, I requested the member not to attend the sittings of the House till the issue was deliberated upon by the leaders and a decision taken.

Considering the gravity of the situation, I held a meeting with the Hon'ble Leaders of different parties on 15 May 2007 to deliberate upon the matter, so that a course of action could be decided to deal with such matters in future. As unanimously suggested by the Hon'ble Leaders, I have constituted an eleven-member Committee of members of Lok Sabha to, *inter alia*, inquire into the instances of misconduct of the members of Lok Sabha, including misuse of parliamentary privileges and facilities by them and also to look into the desirability of defining what acts would amount to misconduct on the part of a member and make suitable recommendations regarding action to be taken in cases of such misconduct.

I believe that going beyond normal parliamentary practices and procedures, we should take measures which would result in our institution taking proactive steps on important issues of public interest so that the same may be reflected in the House. We have started a Lecture Series in Parliament to enable the parliamentarians to benefit from the views of experts on issues of contemporary parliamentary or national importance. Such Lectures have proved to be very instructive and popular as they provide good and relevant insight into different subjects. The Presiding Officers of the State Legislatures may consider having such Lecture Series for the benefit of the members of their Legislative Assemblies too.

In the last Conference, I had informed you about the constitution of several Parliamentary Fora in our Parliament. To begin with, we constituted a Parliamentary Forum on Water. Since then, three more such fora—one each

on Youth, Children, and Population and Public Health—have been constituted. These fora provide a platform to the members to have interactions with experts and key officials from the Ministries concerned. The focused and meaningful discussions help formulate a result-oriented approach for the speedy and effective implementation of the programmes in the respective fields. Such interactions also enable the members to effectively raise the issues on the floor of the House. We have clear-cut guidelines for the working of these fora so as to ensure that they do not interfere with or encroach upon the jurisdiction of the Departmentally Related Standing Committees or the Ministries/Departments concerned.

You may recall that two separate dedicated Satellite Channels were launched on 14 December 2004 for the live telecast of the entire proceedings of the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha nationwide by *Doordarshan*. I am pleased to inform you that from 11 May 2006, we have started our own Lok Sabha Television Channel (LSTV) independent of the *Doordarshan*. Besides the live telecast of the Lok Sabha proceedings, various programmes are also being telecast on this Channel. From 24 July 2006, it has become functional as a 24-hour Channel with a number of valuable and informative programmes. I hope this Channel will help develop an informed citizenry and in creating close link between the House of the People and our citizens, who are the real masters, which will lead to more perceptive understanding of our parliamentary functioning. I wish to convey my sincere thanks to the Hon'ble Prime Minister and the Hon'ble Minister for Information and Broadcasting for providing help in the launching and running of the LSTV.

In another initiative, in Parliament, we have set up the Parliament Museum in the Parliament Library Building which was inaugurated by the Hon'ble President of India on 14 August 2006. The Museum is a hi-tech, interactive and 'story-telling museum' which depicts the democratic ethos and institutional development of our country with the help of audio-visual aids. Being more a Museum of events than of objects like other Museums, it transports the visitors into the earlier times with its walk-through period settings, sound-light-video synchronization, large screen interactive computer multi-media, and visualization with multi-screen panoramic projection, virtual reality and animatronics. It is hoped that the Museum will particularly inspire the new generation to learn more about our democratic legacy and traditions and also to participate enthusiastically in the process of nation-building. The Museum has since been opened to the general public and all students are allowed to enter without any fee or charge. It is encouraging that the Museum is becoming more and more popular with regular stream of visitors, particularly students and I invite all to visit the Museum as and when you visit Delhi.

In this Conference, we will be discussing two important subjects and issues which have acquired great relevance though they have been discussed in earlier Conferences also. The subjects, *viz.* 'Indiscipline including Disregard of Presiding Officers, Disturbances, Disruptions and other Serious Acts of Misconduct in Legislatures—Future Strategies to Improve the Situation' and 'Relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary' are undoubtedly of contemporary significance.

In a parliamentary democracy, which is governed by the Rule of Law and the Constitution, being a legislator is at once a privilege and an honour, which also brings with it certain rights as well as responsibilities. It is through the elected representatives that the sovereign will of the people finds expression in our legislative bodies. The trust and faith which the people have reposed in us need to be reciprocated with sincerity and commitment to their welfare.

The parliamentary system of governance for our country was decided upon by the Founding Fathers of our Constitution as the most suitable method for the progress and development of our people. In this system the legislative bodies are the most important institutions which the people elect and they expect that their representatives will discharge their duties with commitment, sincerity and probity. It is a matter of greatest concern that, of late, the people are getting disillusioned, if not cynical, about the relevance of parliamentary system, as they find that the different legislatures are not functioning in a manner which will evoke the respect and admiration of the people. This, no doubt, is greatly weakening the foundations of our polity and indeed our whole political structure itself. I urge upon the legislators in our country, with all humility, to introspect and see whether they are contributing towards strengthening the system or not and whether they are faithful to their electors or not, as they are the real masters in a democracy.

Dignified conduct of the members of our Legislatures, both inside and outside the Chambers, is an essential pre-requisite for an effective parliamentary system. The subject of discussion for this Conference deals with the manner in which the members conduct themselves in the House and to evolve strategies to improve the situation. Though the maintenance of order in the House is the primary duty of the Presiding Officer, the members owe a duty to cooperate with the Chair and also need to have a commitment to preserve and maintain the dignity and prestige of the House by their decorous behaviour. It is a common experience that the deliberations in the House are often interrupted for reasons and by methods which can never be justified. On many occasions interruptions lead to pandemonium, with members coming to the well, which is totally prohibited, shouting slogans inside the House, interrupting others from speaking and totally disregarding,

if not deliberately insulting, the Chair, causing forced adjournment of the scheduled business which not only results in loss of the precious time of the House, but subverts the very process of the Legislatures functioning in accordance with the constitutional mandate and, in the process, undermining the people's faith in them.

It is quite distressing that proceedings of the House are often disrupted not spontaneously but by deliberate acts of some members committed for narrow political reasons in complete disregard of efforts made by the Presiding Officers to regulate the proceedings. Time has come for all of us to be greatly concerned about the falling standards of parliamentary behaviour generally. Scenes of unruly behaviour naturally attract adverse public comments, to which we cannot take exception. We must ever remember that the loss of people's faith can lead to irreparable damage to our democratic institution. Disruptions are given front page coverage in Newspapers and on Television Channels, while sadly, important debates do not seem to attract media attention. This has unfortunately given Members the erroneous impression that disruption of the House ensures ample publicity—and not serious and structured debates on matters of national concern. Some members feel that disturbances and forced adjournments are the only effective methods of registering concern on issues they consider important. West Bengal has had an extremely unpleasant experience, when unprecedented scenes of vandalism and destruction of public property were witnessed in the Assembly Chamber last year.

As Presiding Officer, I meet Leaders of various Political Parties in different Groups, before every Session to seek their cooperation and help for the smooth conduct of the House. While assurances of providing support are made, they are unfortunately, often breached. We all, including the Prime Minister, feel greatly troubled about these developments. It has, therefore, been decided to hold another high-level Meeting, on the lines organised by me in 2004, to discuss the steps to ensure orderly conduct of House proceedings and to reach a consensus on strategies to achieve this important objective. At this Conference, we must deliberate with due seriousness these critical issues. We may learn from one another's experiences and devise ways to end unseemly disorders and disruptions.

It is imperative to take effective steps to prevent the fast decline and deterioration in standards of legislators' behaviour. India is the largest democracy in the world and I do not perceive of any alternative to parliamentary democracy for our country. It will make us truly proud if we can claim that our functioning is exemplary and a model for other democracies—both newly emerging and the older ones. I must confess that when the visiting foreign delegations witness scenes of disruption in the House, it is particularly painful for the Presiding Officer. Of course, they are polite and describe these as examples of vibrancy of our democracy!

To me the present tendency to show disrespect to the Chair and to violate the rules and well-established conventions, indulging in most undignified behaviour, acting in concert to force adjournments of the House, even not permitting, on many occasions, the Question Hour and debates and discussions in the House, are matters of serious concern warranting deep introspection. Gandhiji's wise advice that one should listen to others, in order to appreciate all facets of the issues, should be our guiding principle. High decibels and incapacity to communicate, should not become the hallmarks of our functioning. Sagacity, maturity, honesty of purpose and dedication to address national problems are the need of the hour. I believe that time has come when we should give up confrontational politics and identify national issues, which are extremely important to be dealt with in our Legislatures with dignity and commitment and in a spirit of efficiently discharging our primary duty as people's representatives.

Friends, it is an extremely sad reflection of the lack of responsibility on the part of the legislators generally that even the Budget and Finance Bill in the Lok Sabha on several occasions had to be passed without any discussion. Many important legislations are similarly passed which is making a mockery of the very basis of the parliamentary functioning, in which structured debate and discussion involving all sections of the House is of crucial importance.

Along with the unbecoming conduct inside the Legislative Chambers there are serious allegations, from time to time, against one or the other member or members of being guilty of corrupt practices and different types of criminal activity which put us all to shame. In these circumstances, can we blame our people for getting disillusioned about the functioning of the different Legislatures in our country and for the cynicism creeping into them about the efficacy of democratic experiments itself ? This is increasingly being reflected in the apathy towards the functioning of the Parliament and the Legislatures and to the democratic process themselves and in the growing disinterest among the young educated men and women in the political activities of our country.

This very sad and depressing situation which is causing a slur on the system of parliamentary democracy, raising questions about the relevance of the System of Parliamentary Democracy, should not be ignored or minimized. As Presiding Officers, should we be only spectators and express our helplessness and allow the whole system to slide down causing irreparable damage to our polity ? A plea is taken in many cases that because of the non-functioning or improper functioning of Legislative Bodies in the country, the people are forced to look up to Judiciary for remedy and action and the result is there for all to see.

The disease seems to have overtaken many of the political parties across our entire political spectrum and there is now not only confrontational politics but also competitive efforts to make the Legislature itself a victim of partisan politics. I appeal to all to ponder very seriously. We should all unitedly endeavour to enforce suitable measures, if appeals and requests fail to bear any result. We should expect exemplary behaviour from the members on all occasions and it is for the Presiding Officers also to provide, as much as possible, due opportunities to the members and particularly to the Opposition to raise matters of importance, but in no circumstances should there be any disrespect to the Chair or disturbances in the House. We cannot throw up our arms in frustration or desperation. I earnestly implore to all the legislators in this country to set norms of exemplary behaviour, so that we can be proud of the functioning of our legislative system.

During the last Budget Session, the Lok Sabha could not transact any business for over 73 hours because of disruption and forced adjournments. This shows how deep the malady has gone. It is our bounden duty as Presiding Officer to see that our most precious institution that the Founding Fathers have constituted, our Legislatures, do not come to a grinding halt. For dealing with such situation, I feel one of the proper remedies may be to provide for the recall of members by their constituents for any misbehaviour in the House or for the failure to serve their electorates. I feel that it is a national duty for all of us to see that our constitutional framework is not damaged irreparably. This is my sincere appeal not only to the Presiding Officers but also to all the legislators in the country to respect the electoral verdict, which is to represent the people for the solution of their problems and grievances and to endeavour to fulfil the dreams, urges and aspirations of the people within our constitutional framework.

The other subject which will be discussed at the Conference is, 'Relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary' the two major organs of our constitutional set up. Our object is not to find out areas of any conflict or confrontation but to stress on areas where there should be harmonious co-operation between the two organs, consistent with the principle of Separation of Powers which, with the system of checks and balances, is one of the most characteristic features of our constitutional scheme. As has been observed by the present Chief Justice of India Hon'ble Justice Balakrishnan, 'the Constitution lays down the structure and defines the limits and demarcates the role and function of every organ of the State, including the Judiciary and establishes norms for their inter relationships, checks and balances'.

The Constitution does not give any unfettered power to any organ and all the three principal organs are expected to work in harmony 'in a joint and participatory role ... instead of an exclusive primacy of any one in the process',

to quote former Chief Justice J.S. Verma. Democracy does not contemplate any single public functionary which will have absolute power and, to my mind, our Constitution does not contemplate the existence of any Super-organ or any organ having overriding authority on others.

The people of India occupy the pivotal role in our Constitution and it is the sovereign will of the people, which finds expression through their chosen representatives in the Parliament which has been accorded a pre-eminent position in our constitutional and political set-up, with the power, *inter alia*, to make laws, to exercise control over the nation's purse, to make the Executive accountable to the popular House and even to amend the Constitution. But obviously it has to act within the parameters laid down by the Constitution. The constitutional mandate to the Judiciary is to interpret the laws and not to make them, nor to lay down general norms of behaviour for the Government or to decide upon public policy. As I have said elsewhere the concept is 'judicial review' and not 'judicial activism', which goes much beyond review. In my humble submission, the scope of judicial review is confined to the enquiry as to whether any impugned legislation or an executive action falls within the competence of the Legislature or of the executive authority or is consistent with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution or with its other mandatory provisions.

The Supreme Court itself has construed the concept of Separation of Powers as a 'basic feature' of the Constitution. To my mind, that being so, necessarily, each organ of the State has been provided with separate areas of functioning, into which no other organ can enter or intervene, unless permitted by the Constitution itself and if it so does, or seeks to do, it will be contrary to one of the 'basic features' of our Constitution and this restraint is applicable to the Judiciary also.

No body can take exception to any decision taken by the Judiciary in the exercise of judicial review (subject, of course, to the provision of review or appeal, where it lies) invalidating any law or executive action, but where it seeks to lay down some new policy to be adopted or actions to be taken and uses its supposed power to compel executive action on the same, without any known authority or procedure, serious questions necessarily arise about the source of such power. In my humble submission the Judiciary cannot exercise its power of judicial review to lay down new policy nor to direct actions to be taken which are of executive nature, nor can it take upon the mantle of executive authority. As former Chief Justice Verma has expressed 'judicial activism should be neither judicial ad-hocism nor judicial tyranny'.

Recently while delivering Dr. Kailash Nath Katju Memorial Lecture I had an opportunity to deal with the subject of Separation of Powers under our Constitution and on Judicial Activism. In my humble view, time has come for

the organs, under our constitutional set up, to introspect into their respective roles and to consider whether they are discharging their duties and functions in accordance with the constitutional mandate or whether while exercising some power they are creating avoidable tensions affecting the harmonious relationship between the organs. I am sure that all of us hold the Judiciary in highest respect and we must appreciate generally the manner in which our Judiciary has been discharging its paramount function of Judicial review. I am sure all the Presiding Officers are keen to see that there is no question of creating any situation, which will cause any disharmony in the relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary.

There are instances when questions are being, if I may say so, properly raised whether any organ has the right to exceed its authority and jurisdiction. The Jharkhand Assembly case, which raised the question, whether the Judiciary has any authority to interfere with the proceedings in the Legislature, the question of the jurisdiction of the Legislature in dealing with matters of discipline of its members and the right of the Judiciary to interfere with the same, the matter relating to the right of the Judiciary to interdict the will of the Legislature as expressed through a law passed unanimously by it, the question whether matters of policy can be decided by the Judiciary, questions arising out of the decision of the Supreme Court over-riding the effect of the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, etc. are matters where it is honestly perceived that the *lakshman rekha* has been crossed by the Judiciary.

Under the Constitution, the Executive is accountable to the Legislature for all its actions. As I stated in the Dr. Katju Memorial Lecture, once the Judiciary gets involved with an issue which falls within the Executive domain, it precludes the possibility of the Legislature exercising its very important assigned role of ensuring executive accountability through effective legislative scrutiny. In my humble view, discharge of Executive responsibilities by any other authority, howsoever highly placed, but non-accountable, is anathema in a democracy. I am of the opinion that no authority can interfere with the Legislature's absolute constitutional right to enforce executive accountability. Surely, the Legislature cannot be expected to surrender its absolute power on the assumption that any other organ has inherent superiority or a monopoly of concern for the people or it can alone solve their problems. Obviously such matters require to be debated and discussed in a proper atmosphere and with a sense of responsibility, so that the possibility of any misunderstanding or disharmony between the two major organs of our State can be eliminated. I am confident that we shall discuss the matter in the Conference with full sense of responsibility and with the full respect to the Judiciary and in an objective manner to ascertain the scope and ambit of the principle of Separation of Powers.

Hon'ble Presiding Officers, ours is the largest working democracy in the world in which the Legislatures are expected to play a crucial role in shaping the destiny of the nation. Our Legislatures not only symbolize the urges, aspirations and expectations of our people but have multi-dimensional functions to perform. Besides law-making, they are responsible for keeping a constant surveillance over the administration, for debating the policies and subjects of public importance and for articulating people's grievances. As such, the success and effectiveness of these deliberative bodies rest on their orderly functioning and also on the adherence to the highest standards of discipline, dignity and decorum. We need the cooperation and support from all members for the smooth running of the House and for the better management of its time. In this context, the Conference of Presiding Officers is an important forum as it gives us an opportunity to share and learn from our experiences and also devise better ways of effectively regulating the proceedings in the respective Houses. I hope and trust the deliberations at this Conference will prove to be immensely productive and useful for all of us, the Presiding Officers and the members including the ministers.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again place on record our deep appreciation and hearty thanks to our hosts, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Kerala and his colleagues, the Hon'ble Speaker and the Hon'ble Deputy Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, the Secretary and the Staff of the Legislative Assembly, the Government of Kerala and all those associated with the organization of this Conference here for the excellent arrangements and, of course, for their gracious hospitality.

With these words, I am immensely pleased to inaugurate the 72nd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India.

Thank you very much.

It is an honour for me to associate myself with the year long celebrations to mark the birth centenary of Babu Jagjivan Ram. As a veteran national leader and freedom fighter, trade union leader, great organizer, brilliant orator, crusader for social justice, champion of the depressed classes, an outstanding parliamentarian, true democrat and able administrator and a distinguished Minister, Babuji occupied a pre-eminent position in our national and political life. I have had the good fortune of observing Babuji as a national leader and parliamentarian in the Lok Sabha and also to enjoy his affection. I greatly cherish the memory of the limited interactions I had with him during my early years in Parliament as rewarding and educative experiences. His choice of words and his ability to carry the House with him when it was turbulent (but not of the modern variety) was admirable, if I may say so, left a great impression on my mind.

Born in an environment where casteism's ugly tentacles divided Indian society, Jagjivan Ram was determined to fight the injustice of the caste system. Endowed with a sensitive soul, he was filled with anguish at the sad plight of the *harijans*. From his early days, he protested against the segregation imposed on the so-called untouchables. In 1922, in the Town School, Arrah, he protested against the practice of keeping a separate pitcher of water for him and was able to have the practice discontinued. In the Benaras Hindu University, he organized a resistance movement against segregation and oppression.

A brilliant student of science, Babuji wanted to become a scientist but chose to answer the call of the motherland and joined the freedom movement. In Calcutta, while pursuing his B.Sc. degree, he organized a massive *mazdoor* rally at Wellington Square, which was attended by over 35,000 people. This caught the attention of leaders like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his organizational abilities were much in demand in the Indian National Congress during the crucial one and a half decades preceding India's Independence. He was imprisoned by the British for his active participation in the Satyagraha and Quit India Movement. For his refusal to yield to the British policy of Divide and Rule in spite of inducements, Mahatma Gandhi praised Babuji in

* At the Function to mark the Birth Centenary of Late Babu Jagjivan Ram, Keynote Address on *Parliamentary Democracy in India*, New Delhi (30 May 2007).

his journal *Harijan* on 17 April 1937 thus: 'This man of the suppressed classes has shown how one can be rich in poverty, high in lowliness and self-respecting in the midst of insults and humiliation heaped upon them. Will the so-called high caste Hindus take note of a servant of India?'

From 1936 to 1986, Babuji had an uninterrupted parliamentary career spanning five decades, during which he was elected unopposed on no less than three occasions, and won every parliamentary election held in Independent India until his demise and that is the world record, no one has been able to beat so far. In 1946, he became the youngest member in the Interim Government of Lord Wavell. As Labour Minister in the National Government, he laid the foundations for a new era of labour welfare, through the Minimum Wages Act, Employees State Insurance Act, the Industrial Disputes Act, the Payment of Bonus Act and the Provident Fund Act. As Minister of Communications, he took active steps to spread postal facilities to the remotest corners of the country. As Railway Minister, he gave a new thrust to the modernization of Railways. But his greatest contribution to the country came during his tenure as Minister for Agriculture, when he transformed a food-deficit country into a self-sufficient one through the stunning success of the first Green Revolution. Later as Defence Minister, he galvanized the entire nation and its armed forces for the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. It was during his tenure as Defence Minister that India entered into the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation.

Babu Jagjivan Ram symbolized the dawn of a new era of assertion by the depressed classes. The provision for State intervention for the advancement of the socially backward classes by way of reservation in public employment and reservation of seats in Legislatures for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes owes its success to leaders like Babu Jagjivan Ram. He was instrumental in incorporating the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 in our statute books. For his unwavering support and relentless struggle for the cause of the downtrodden, he has rightly been hailed as the 'Messiah of Dalits'. His Birth Anniversary is appropriately celebrated as *Samata Divas*, in recognition of his life-long endeavour to bring about equality among all sections of society.

The most significant contribution of Babu Jagjivan Ram in the nation-building process apart from his service to the nation as Leader of the Congress Party and a very efficient Minister was the mobilization of dalits and mainstreaming them through educational and economic inputs. In the Constituent Assembly, it was the leadership provided by stalwarts like Babuji that article 46 found a place in the Constitution, mandating the State to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The result of this vital constitutional provision is there for

all to see: there has been a five-fold increase in the literacy rate of Scheduled Castes, from 10 per cent in 1961 to 55 per cent in 2001. Literacy among Scheduled Caste girls has grown from 3 per cent in 1961 to 42 per cent in 2001. The enrolment in higher education has also increased from less than 1 per cent in the early 1950s to about 6 per cent in 2005. The current policy of reservations in public educational institutions has helped in improving enrolment in higher education, facilitating job opportunities for dalits.

As India moves steadily towards a more inclusive and egalitarian social order, we look back in gratitude to our national leaders like Babu Jagjivan Ram who gave a voice to a huge section of voiceless people, seamlessly integrating them into the country's social fabric, thereby providing a lasting foundation for social harmony and social cohesion. It is from this spring board of social cohesion and strength, that India is poised to leap onto the world stage as an example of a successful transitional multi-cultural society. Once again, I pay my respect to the memory of Babuji and hope that we will carry forward his unfinished work in the days to come. I am particularly happy that his eminently qualified daughter, Smt. Meira Kumarji, is carrying forward his great tradition of public service with tremendous commitment and success.

It is an honour to me that in a function to commemorate a parliamentarian *par excellence*, whose parliamentary experience spanned five decades uninterruptedly, I should get the opportunity to speak on parliamentary democracy in India, which incidentally is the largest working democracy in the world and to refer to some of the burning issues that relate to the health of our democracy.

Western historians have traditionally seen democracy as a Western concept of governance and held that democratic values are foreign to the non-Western world and are, therefore, destined to fail when implemented in post-colonial societies like India. This sweeping generalization has been proved to be totally baseless by the onward march of Indian democracy. In the 1950s, most Western scholars described the adoption of democracy in India as 'unnatural', given the vast heterogeneity in Indian society in terms of religion, caste, language and culture. They asserted that for democracy to take root, some essential social conditions were required to operate, chief among which were — a common language, common religion, a shared sense of common destiny and, most importantly, a literate and politically-conscious people. In the 1960s, Selig Harrison, an American scholar wrote: 'The odds are wholly against the survival of freedom and ... the issue is, in fact, whether the Indian state can survive at all.'

In 1967, *The Time* magazine carried out a series of articles entitled *'India's Disintegrating Democracy'* by Neville Maxwell, and he concluded: 'The great

experiment of developing India within a democratic framework has failed'. Most western scholars in the seventies prophesied that India would either become an autocracy, be balkanized into smaller political units or be the victim of mass starvation. Lately, even some Indian commentators have called India an 'unlikely' democracy or a 'fifty-fifty' democracy. But all their assessments and prophesies have been found to be baseless, which prove the strength and spirit of the Indian people and their commitment to a democratic polity and way of life.

Democracy is deeply ingrained in India's ancient culture, which taught respect for divergent, and even dissenting, points of view. The *Rig Veda* mentions the institutions of 'Sabhas' and 'Samitis' where decisions were taken after debate and deliberation, through consensus. It is now a well-researched fact that republican polities were quite common in the Buddhist period from 600 BC to 200 AD. The Pali canon, the grammar of *Panini* and Kautilya's *Arthashastra* talk about the presence of *'Sangha'* and *'Gana'* in the governance system of those times. India's village panchayats have thrived through the ages as forums for collective decision-making. The first few exhibits of our Parliament Museum throw light on this aspect of Indian history.

It is true that the journey of Indian democracy has been far from smooth, particularly in the initial years after attaining freedom from foreign rule. But India's fledgeling democracy has withstood all attempts for destabilisation of the country. We saw the rise of language, religion, caste and other social identities as issues of confrontation impinging on the growth of a modern, secular and united nation. Yet, Indian democracy, despite all these challenges, has not only survived but has become a model of political development for post-colonial societies across the world. It is no mean achievement that democracy has taken deep roots in India while other nations in India's neighbourhood are in deep political turmoil. In this respect, the contribution of Babuji with his faith in the democratic commitment of the people has been immeasurable, which was proved by his decision to found a new political party 'Congress for Democracy' when it was thought by many that democracy in our country would be difficult to restore. We owe a deep debt of gratitude for his great political farsight and for his outstanding leadership in those difficult days. Of course, imperfections remain. Critics point out that confrontational politics has accentuated religious, linguistic and casteist divisions in the society and that unfortunately political power has organized itself around the existing identities of caste, religion, and language, thereby making the political system an accentuated reflection of the existing social inequalities.

Today, however, there are welcome signs that the democratic idea is beginning to transcend caste, creed and religious faith and of the immense

potential of India's democratic processes to blur distinctions of caste and religion. I am firmly of the view that our people wish to live in harmony without emphasizing on their differences of caste, religion and language. Our democratic processes can play and are playing in weakening the social divisions of language, religion, caste and class. It is through the crucible of democracy that the traditionally disenfranchised sections of society are acquiring a new voice and role in India's governance. In that sense, democracy has become the ultimate leveller, undoing centuries of inequity and injustice, and providing a level playing field for all.

Now, India's institutions of democratic governance are hailed across the developing world as a model political system, just as India's hugely multi-cultural society is seen as a beacon light for those transitional societies, which are struggling to cope with complexities of race, religion, language and culture. Today, the developing world looks up to India with admiration and rightly so, as India successfully treads the difficult path of democratic governance with a billion-plus people. As the 72nd and 73rd Amendments finally take firmer root, to make the Fourth tier of governance more effective, let us celebrate the fact that today, 34 per cent of India's 35 lakh legislators at the Panchayat level are women. It is from among these men and women trained in parliamentary democracy at the grass roots that Parliament will draw its future members, which augurs well for the Institution.

The driving force behind Indian democracy is our people—the vast electorate, which in spite of a substantial percentage of illiteracy, has shown great enthusiasm for participation in the governance process. It has also revealed an uncanny political maturity that confounds western observers. There are 620 million voters in India, equivalent to one-tenth of the global population. Of the 14 General Elections conducted at the Centre, Governments have been changed six times. It was this electorate that punished a Government for invoking emergency powers of governance and put in place a new Government that undid the damage caused, thereby restoring the role of the democratic institutions, including the Judiciary, in protecting the Fundamental Rights of the people. The faceless voter of India is something no political party can take for granted and is Indian democracy's best guarantee.

Another big guarantee for Indian democracy remains the Constitution of India, which is firmly based on the principles of equality and justice for all social groups. This emancipatory and egalitarian document offers hope to India's vast multitudes of achieving socio-economic transformation through peaceful and constitutional means. Thanks to the enabling provisions of the Constitution, India has met the challenge of developmental imbalances by providing affirmative action or 'positive discrimination' in favour of those who have suffered deprivation and disempowerment historically.

Today, more and more people from the backward sections of society are utilizing the avenues provided by the Constitution, to move up the social and economic ladders, to reclaim their place under the sun. The fact that the Indian Constitution has been amended ninety four times should be seen as a testament to its living and organic nature, alertly responding to the nation's needs in a constantly changing environment.

Prof. Amartya Sen has singled out the 'rise and development of democracy' as the single most important phenomenon of the twentieth century. Contradicting those who favour authoritarian regimes on the grounds that they foster speedier economic development, Prof. Sen points out that there has never been a famine in a functioning multi-party democracy. Democracy, he says, is integrally linked with 'Public Reasoning', the three essential features of which are: First, public reasoning involves respect for pluralism and a tolerance for differing points of view. Second, public reasoning demands an open public discussion of issues of common concern. Third, public reasoning encourages political participation of the people in public action for the transformation of society. One could not agree more with Prof. Sen and how true it is for India's democracy!

However, to ensure that democracy continues to thrive, our democratic institutions must deliver to meet the expectations of the people. Today, sadly, there is a growing perception among some sections of our people, particularly the youth, that democratic institutions of governance are not functioning as they should. While the public perceives a general decline in all our institutions of governance, it is the Parliament and State Assemblies that have come in for strong criticism. Any discussion in India's parliamentary democracy calls for some honest introspection among the political class. As the Presiding Officer of the House of the People, I cannot but express my great unhappiness that during the just-concluded Budget Session, the Lok Sabha lost a total of 73 hours (34 per cent of its scheduled time) due to frequent disruptions; that several important legislations, including the Finance Bill, had to be passed without debate and discussion. National dailies have even written editorials criticizing the fact that on 19 March, Lok Sabha passed three bills in a span of ten minutes, by a voice vote.

This derailment of Parliament from its primary duty of lawmaking is not going unnoticed. Parliament provides us with a forum where contentious issues can be discussed so that solutions can be found after different political parties express their views. For a country like ours, it is the ideal place for conflict resolution and conflict management. But, such is the current phase of competitive and confrontational politics that Parliament is finding itself unable to discharge its primary duty of informed debating and consensus building on contentious issues. To be successful, Parliament must not only be

representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective but should also function in a manner which will generate the people's faith and confidence in the great utility of the institution itself.

There is unfortunately disillusionment among many sections of our people and questions are being asked about the utility and relevance of Parliament in our polity and, indeed, about the workability of our democratic set-up based on the parliamentary system. These are dangerous perceptions, which will create frustration about our future and will make people look for alternatives, which will be the end of democracy itself, which is our most valuable possession, bestowed on us by our founding fathers. We should do nothing, and indeed cannot afford to do anything, through our utterances and actions, to diminish the credibility of Parliament in the eyes of the people.

The expulsion of ten Members of Parliament in 2005 in the 'Cash for Query Scam' was a watershed event in parliamentary history across the world; nowhere have so many elected legislators in a national Parliament been expelled for a misdemeanour by a vote of the House. The three-month suspension of four members of Lok Sabha in 2006 for their role in irregularities related to the MPLADS funds demonstrated the resolve of the House to cleanse itself and to lay down new standards of conduct for its members. Both measures won the people's resounding approval. However, that process of self-cleansing must continue and the recent allegations against some members about their alleged role in human trafficking are now being investigated by a Committee set up by me, as the Speaker.

I feel now time has come when we must stand up unitedly against the intrusion of money power and muscle power in our electoral process and also of people of questionable conduct and credibility into the political arena. We must cleanse our political system of people who have no real faith and commitment to our democratic polity who should also be debarred from opportunities to pollute the temples of democracy, our Parliament and the Legislatures.

If Parliament does not function effectively and loses public trust, parliamentary democracy, too, will begin to wilt. Parliament is the fountainhead of the people's will and aspirations. To raise Parliament's esteem in the people's eye, we urgently need to find solutions to address the issues of quality of debates, falling attendance of members, unruly behaviour and to the increasing tendency of stalling parliamentary proceedings to register dissent. We need sincere commitment by all political parties to allow Parliament to function and to introduce the system of Recall to deal with those members, who function in a manner unbecoming the conduct of a member. We should devote more time for law-making; make the Committee

System more effective, to better oversee Government's functions and to better scrutinize proposed legislations. But what is needed most is total commitment to our Constitution and to the due functioning of the Houses of Parliament and of the Legislatures, which are all constituted by the people.

I have drawn your attention to some unfortunate developing situations which will weaken our democratic structure unless all of us, particularly our young people, are truly committed to its sustenance and functioning. I am firmly of the view that there is no reason to be pessimistic and a temporary phase of some doubts and uncertainties can not stifle the people's urges and aspirations which will be fulfilled by following the path shown by our great leaders who assembled at our Central Hall to draw a Constitution for us, of which we are all proud.

We should, however, not overlook our accomplishments under the parliamentary system of governance in the past nearly six decades. Our Parliament constituted by the people in the exercise of their democratic rights has indeed worked as a vehicle of social engineering and its initiative, all these years, in enacting several laws, among other things, to bring about social change, to enlarge opportunities for education, for comprehensive land reforms, to help provide just and humane conditions of work, to ensure maternity relief, to provide protection to women at the work place, to broaden the base of women's participation in politics, to safeguard the vulnerable sections against social discrimination and violence and atrocities, against child marriages, to seek to eliminate the evil practice of dowry, to provide a conducive environment for the development of children, to put an end to the sexual exploitation of women and their indecent representation, to protect women from domestic violence, to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of our society, including women, children and the minorities, to ensure and guarantee rural employment and thereby to address rural poverty, among others, has to be viewed from this broad social perspective. Several laws have been passed over the years prohibiting practices that are inimical to the societal development, and for the creation of a civilized society.

As a nation we have undoubtedly made considerable progress in different spheres. Apart from several beneficial and progressive legislations that guide us today, India, under a participative democratic structure and an open society, which we are enjoying because of our democratic ethos, has become an important economic power in the world and we possess an enormous pool of talent. There is no reason why we should not be able to fulfil our still incomplete task of becoming a developed nation free from hunger, illiteracy, disease and exploitation. We can achieve that and we shall do it provided we do not stray from our path of steadfast commitment to our democratic order.

Today we can take pride in being the largest working democracy in the world, having successfully come through Fourteen General Elections and several elections to the representative bodies at other levels. Our people have clearly demonstrated great prudence and wisdom in exercising their franchise. The institution that can claim the maximum credit for creating conditions for democracy to flourish in the country, undoubtedly, is our Parliament. No other institution can claim to match the collective capacity of our Parliament to be sensitive to the cause of the common masses. It is under the leadership of the same Parliament that the process of democratic consolidation is taking place in the country. At the end of six decades of parliamentary democratic life, the balance-sheet of performance is definitely in favour of this great people's institution. That, however, should not make us complacent. As F.D. Roosevelt said, 'democracy is an everlasting march' and 'eternal vigilance is the price that its participants, the people, have to pay for its sustenance'.

Our Constitution envisages a federal structure with powers divided between the Centre and the States and also a setup based on the system of 'Separation of Powers' with checks and balances of the three organs – namely, the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. It has provided different territories for the different organs, with no organ having any overriding power or authority over others. For the democracy to be consolidated upon a surer foundation, it is essential to remember that if we have strong States, then we will have a strong Centre which will make our federal structure a more workable one. We should also ensure that all our constitutional organs work harmoniously and with respect for each other, within their constitutional rights and duties and such harmony and mutual respect should be the basis of our democratic functioning.

Our people, particularly our youth, should never lose their faith in our political process which are based on the strong foundation of our democratic structure. The task of addressing the inadequacies in the system can be accomplished only if our youth passionately involve themselves in strengthening the system by actively participating in the nation-building activities. It should be our collective endeavour to ensure that issues concerning our people occupy the center-stage of political discourse in the country. We need more and more dynamic young men and women, with idealism and commitment to public causes, to enter our political life and the democratic institutions and help to infuse our system with a new vigour and vitality. They should realize that a life of dignity and honour that we are enjoying today is the result of the sacrifices and contribution of our freedom fighters and leaders, who have shown great vision. We have not only to preserve but consolidate the same. We should be able to combat the forces and elements which are trying to vitiate our socio-political culture and

undermining our institutions of democracy. I would, therefore, call upon our people, particularly our youth, to come forward and make their contributions to further consolidate our democracy and to strengthen our representative system. For us, there is no alternative nor any substitute for our democratic structure based on the parliamentary system.

Friends, democratic institutions are like tender saplings; if not nurtured with diligence and care, they can wither away. The world has seen umpteen instances of failed democracies, countries that started out on the path of democratic governance but soon became authoritarian regimes, as they could not protect their democratic institutions. The tenuous beauty of democratic institutions is that they protect the citizen only when they themselves are protected. Parliament, being the repository of the sovereign will of the people, is the country's supreme representative institution. I am of the firm view that parliamentary democracy shall always prevail in India based on people's faith in democracy and their abhorrence of dictatorship and exploitative and divisive order. Our people are the best guardians.

Thank you.

CHALLENGES BEFORE OUR DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM*

I am thankful to the Students' Central Association of the Himachal Pradesh University for giving me this opportunity to be here with you all this evening.

The Himachal Pradesh University has made remarkable progress and has grown into a major centre of learning, making its mark on the region and the State as a whole. Everyone associated with this University can be proud of its growth and accomplishments over the years.

The students of this University have the benefit of having a very dynamic and socially conscious Students' Central Association which has been in the forefront of various struggles for protecting the democratic rights of not only of the students but also of the people of this State since its inception in 1978 under the Presidentship of Shri Rakesh Singha who provided the path-breaking leadership for the student community of the State of Himachal Pradesh as a whole. I beg to convey my greetings and best wishes to the Association and its members for their committed struggles and for their success.

I have been asked to speak on *'The Challenges before our Country's Democratic System'*. I am happy that the students of this university under a responsible leadership are concerning themselves with important issues before our nation.

One of the biggest challenges our Founding Fathers had faced at the dawn of freedom was on the system of government for free India. They opted for a parliamentary system, after extensive discussion and debate, with the conviction that it would best reflect and represent the diversities of India and at the same time facilitate progressive and constructive governance of the country, instilling a sense of dignity and participation in our people who had come out of bondage and humiliation after centuries of subjugation.

In the Constitution of free India, parliamentary democracy was placed as the corner-stone of our political system, thereby recognizing the primacy of our people in our scheme of governance. The Founding Fathers also amalgamated the principle of separation of powers with the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty. The obvious consideration before the Constituent

* At the Function organized by the Students' Central Association, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla (2 June 2007).

Assembly was to preserve and protect the supremacy of the sovereign will of the people in our governance structure.

Our most significant achievement of the first half century of freedom, to my mind, is that we have sustained the parliamentary democratic system, though with many imperfections. Having come through fourteen General Elections and experienced a good degree of political stability for nearly six decades, no one today would dispute that Indian democracy has come of age and is here to stay and that there is no substitute for the same. This democratic consolidation, preserving and protecting the unity of such a heterogeneous country with one billion plus people, practising different religions, speaking innumerable languages, and home to a wide variety of customs and practices, has indeed been a gigantic challenge that post-independent India met successfully, to the envy of many.

Our Parliament is the institution that has contributed the most to the consolidation and strengthening of democracy in the country and is the pivot of our political system. Today, we take great pride in calling ourselves as the largest democracy in the world and this is as it should be. But, we have to introspect about the quality of democracy that we have achieved and see to what extent has democracy facilitated development in the country. We have to achieve our developmental potential and consolidate our democratic functioning.

Today, almost into the seventh decade of freedom, India still lives in different centuries. On the one hand is the India of the affluent, of those who have had the benefit of modern education and other facilities and are intellectually and materially empowered and on the other is the India of those who live under conditions of poverty, deprivation, squalour, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices. We have not yet achieved the desired result of the full empowerment of the socially backward sections. Caste-based social stratification is a reality we still have to reckon with. Similarly, gender-based discrimination is yet another major social issue we have to address. The women who constitute almost 50 per cent of our population are yet to have an effective share in the major political decision-making processes, especially in our representative institutions. Large-scale unemployment is another serious issue we have to grapple with The working class, which is contributing significantly to the building of modern India, is not receiving its due recognition from the system as a whole. More than one-third of our citizens are yet to be extended the benefit of basic education. A sizeable section of our population still do not have access to safe drinking water and dependable energy supply. The benefits of modern medicine and the developments in the field of science, information and communications technologies have not reached many parts of our country yet. Nearly

350 million of our citizens continue to live below the poverty line. The democracy that we are talking about and all its achievements so far has no relevance to more than 400 million of our citizens who are still live unsure of their next square meal. It is the responsibility of all of us, specially our youth, to address these issues seriously and with all commitment to nation-building.

It is a matter of great concern that politics in the country and democratic life as such are beginning to be identified with corruption, criminalisation, and dishonesty, causing to undermine our people's faith in democracy. The obscurantist and communal elements have made serious inroads into our political processes. Degeneration of the electoral system, as a result of the illegal and immoral practices used for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity and contributing to the growing political apathy among the people. Today our people are getting impatient with the way our democratic institutions are functioning. Debates and discussion, the hallmarks of democracy, are being marred by disruption, confrontation and other non-democratic alternatives. Even the institutions, like the media, which has been traditionally perceived as the sentinels of democracy are beginning to be a party to partisan politics because of the prejudice of a section of it. The space for reasoned political discourse is getting gradually reduced and negative and confrontationist politics is beginning to occupy the centre-stage.

Bringing about integrity in our public life and in the political profession is an important issue before our country today. We need to develop a healthier political culture and change the prevailing image of intrigues, disorder, anarchy, fraud, corruption and dishonesty associated with politics and democratic life in the country. Once people lose faith in the system, no force, no army, can help save it. The political parties and other stakeholders, therefore, should come together to evolve a consensus on the ways and means to address this serious issue before our polity today and the responsibility is greatly on our Parliament.

Another important challenge before our democracy today is that of improving the effectiveness of our justice delivery system. The mounting arrears of cases and slow moving judicial process make the scenario quite distressing as this, in many instances, almost amounts to denial of justice itself to the common man.

A very important challenge before us is to see that secular politics is strengthened in our country and that religious feelings do not dictate our political activities. Secularism is an essential quality to be promoted by the Indian State, if our national unity and integrity are to be sustained in the long run. Intolerance, negativism, hatred and violence that have been generated in

the country in the name of narrow, parochial, sectarian, religious and other divisive issues have greatly vitiated the political atmosphere in the country and have inhibited our development.

I would appeal to the younger generation that they should recognize that it is our collective and common responsibility to evolve ways and means to perfect our system of governance. They should not miss any opportunity to play a positive role, as our country, completing sixty years of freedom, has enormous developmental challenges on all fronts of our national life to address and to resolve them for the welfare of the people.

It should be our collective endeavour to take everyone along the path of a modern and progressive socio-economic order by achieving inclusive growth, giving special attention to those whom nearly six decades of planned development has by-passed. The new economic forces of today, no doubt, are bringing along with them new opportunities for development and for contributing to nation-building. It is, however, important for us to ensure that we do not leave anyone behind and that the benefit of development reaches every one.

These, my young friends, can be seen as challenges before you or as providing the opportunities to involve yourself passionately with the affairs of the country and to contribute to the process of redeeming the situation. Our people, particularly, our youth should realize that their responsibility do not end with mere criticism of the imperfections and aberrations in the system and cannot remain as mute spectators to these negative trends, but have the responsibility to apply the correctives too if they want to build a nation of which everyone will feel proud.

Our students should remember that tomorrow belongs to them, and as such, they have the greatest stake in the system, and it is therefore in their self-interest that they come forward to shoulder the responsibilities as citizens in a democracy, and act as the catalyst for positive changes in our society. Otherwise, they will be only passive witnesses to the process of the gradual undermining of the best system of governance thoughtfully bequeathed to us by our Founding Fathers.

Friends, the challenges before our democracy are the challenges for our citizens, particularly the youth, to take on. They should not lose faith in our political processes. To infuse our system with a new vigour and vitality, we need more and more dynamic young men and women, with idealism and commitment to public causes, to enter our political life and the institutions of our democracy. If not, the same forces and elements who are today responsible for vitiating our socio-political culture and undermining our institutions of democracy and of whom you all justifiably are very critical,

will continue to have the upper hand and set our national agenda. I would, therefore, call upon our enterprising youth, specially those who have had the facility of receiving education, to come forward and make their contributions for the all-round progress of our country. With about 43 per cent of our population being young, India has enormous human resources, which can help in bringing about fundamental changes by contributing to the process of accelerated growth and development. Our representative institutions at different levels should be seen as the best avenue for public service and for contributing to the process of taking our great country to its destined role in the world. Ultimately, the people are the best sentinels of democracy.

The common man and woman of India have, time and again, affirmed their faith and trust in our democracy. It is now for the students, teachers and political leaders to never allow this faith to be undermined. I believe, the intellectual community has a duty to advance freedom and knowledge and speak the truth, while highlighting various issues confronting our society and our democracy. The teaching and student community can positively contribute in promoting our religious and cultural diversity, while resisting the advance of fundamentalism and intolerance. Everybody has a role and a responsibility, particularly the educated segments, not to do anything that would weaken our democratic edifice.

As students of this prestigious University, you all should utilize the opportunities provided by the society constructively and equip yourselves to pay back your debts to the society so that you can make a positive impact by committing yourselves to the gigantic task of nation-building. Once outside the safe portals of the University you have to conduct yourselves as role-models for the society at large, as instruments that would work for peace, prosperity and for a cohesive society.

Politics is a factor in our life from cradle to the grave. That being so, the question which our youth should ask themselves is, should they choose to be always at the receiving end or should they come forward to share the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy in a more pro-active way and use that opportunity both to transform the quality of politics in the country and to make a positive impact on the socio-economic fortunes of the people, taking the promises of democracy to all and by helping to make democracy relevant for the common man. Attracting the right talent – the honest, well-meaning, public-spirited and educated youth – into the arena of politics and public life is an important challenge before our democracy today. Analysing the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire the great thinker Gibbon said: 'When the people of Rome wanted not to give to society, but for society to give them, when the freedom they wished foremost was a freedom from responsibility, then it was that Rome ceased to be free.'

I hope you all will always come forward to take on the challenges before our democracy and help create an environment conducive for development and for freedom and for democracy and other progressive ideas to flourish in the country so that every citizen equally enjoys the fruits of our freedom within the system of parliamentary democracy, for which there is no alternative.

Thank you.

COMMEMORATING SIXTY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE*

I deem it a great honour and privilege to welcome you all this evening to this historic occasion as we are commemorating the 60th Anniversary of our Independence. It is indeed befitting that we have all assembled here in this historic Central Hall of Parliament House, where the Constituent Assembly met to draw up our Constitution, providing for parliamentary democracy as the system of our governance, where the people elect their representatives to Parliament, which occupies the pivotal position in our constitutional set up. I am extremely happy to welcome you all, when we are crossing yet another major milestone in our great nation's long and chequered history.

It was in this very Hall that our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, sixty years ago, referred to the emergence of 'a nation to life and freedom as the world slept' and announced India's 'Tryst with destiny'. The year 2007 is historic not merely because we are celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of our Independence. It also marks the 150th Anniversary of our First War of Independence and the Birth Centenary of the legendary Bhagat Singh, one of the greatest heroes of our freedom movement. The First War of Independence was a decisive event in our long and arduous struggle for freedom. The supreme sacrifice made by heroes like young Bhagat Singh and Shahid Khudiram, inspired the nation as a whole. It was the result of such countless sacrifices and fight for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and the struggle launched by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and other national leaders that we won our freedom and emerged as a strong and self-respecting nation of enormous potentials today. Their unforgettable contributions will remain etched in golden letters in the pages of history. They gave up their 'present' so that the nation could have a 'future'. We pay our respectful homage to the memory of generations of our martyrs and freedom fighters.

The eventful journey towards Independence that has been traversed, brought in its trail violent upheavals and traumatic displacements, but as a nation we were able to emerge as a stable, inclusive democracy with one of the best drafted Constitutions as our Guiding Star. The challenges were enormous but they were accepted with the seriousness and commitment

* At the 60th Anniversary of India's Independence, Central Hall, Parliament House, New Delhi (15 August 2007).

called for by our revered leaders, who were of unmatched stature and eminence.

Today there is certainly much to celebrate. We have taken major strides in our national endeavour for development and poverty-alleviation and have succeeded in large measure in taking the benefits of development to substantial sections of our people. We are a power to be reckoned with in the comity of nations because of the great progress we have made, through our democratic structures and processes. When India is referred to as the largest working democracy and as an emerging economic giant, we feel justifiably proud.

We can and will surge ahead further to eradicate all our problems and to wipe out the tears from the eyes of the poor, as the Father of the Nation had dreamt and to bring about the 'emotional integration' of the diverse people of our country as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had visualized and to enrich our political democracy as was contemplated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Our objective continues to be the establishment of a just, humane and inclusive society with equal rights for all and on this solemn occasion we must pledge ourselves once again to implement, in a more comprehensive and inclusive manner, the spirit underlying our Constitution, which is distinguished by its overarching concern for development for all and by strict adherence to democratic norms.

India has committed itself to achieving its Five-year Development Plans. We are now into the 11th Plan Period and are also working towards realizing the UN sponsored Millennium Development Goals. However, we can achieve the Development Goals only if our democratic edifice is preserved in its pristine glory and dignity and if Parliament and the representative institutions and the other organs of the State enjoy the full faith and confidence of the people they are meant to serve. Unfortunately, there are some troubling signs of deterioration of standards. It is imperative for us to rededicate ourselves to remove the distortions and deficiencies that have crept into our democratic structures and concomitant systems. We owe it to our people, who have shown great abilities and wisdom, to work with total commitment with the hallmarks of efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability. We should all emphasise on matters which unite us rather than issues which divide us. Let our representative institutions and the other organs of the State and the media, be role models for the rest of the world and let us all together work with sincerity and commitment towards providing good governance. Let us forge ahead confidently in a manner that the hearts and minds of all our leaders and citizens are imbued with the unequivocal zeal of taking India to greater and greater heights of excellence and achievement. I wish all of you and our nation the very best.

Thank you.

INDIA AT SIXTY: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver this Lecture in memory of Late Sarat Chandra Bose, an outstanding leader and patriot, who had an abiding dedication and unwavering commitment to the cause of India's Freedom. I take this opportunity to pay my respectful homage to his memory as also to the memory of Netaji whose life has inspired the establishment of this Bureau here. Their idealism and the shared commitment to national causes were indeed inspiring for the whole country. I also compliment the Netaji Research Bureau, Kolkata, for instituting the Lecture Series to honour a great leader of impeccable credentials.

Friends, Sarat Chandra Bose was a renowned lawyer and an eminent and revered political leader. He provided enlightened leadership in our Independence Movement without entertaining any personal ambitions. Together with Netaji, Sarat Chandra Bose actively participated in our epic struggle for freedom along with great national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and many others. His vision and statesmanship made a profound impression on the people and he had actively involved himself in the Civil Disobedience Movement and in all the major struggles for achieving freedom and suffered several terms of imprisonment causing frequent interruptions to his legal career.

As the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in the then Bengal Legislative Assembly, Sarat Chandra Bose displayed his great qualities as a legislator, as an orator and as a political strategist. His contribution in resisting the rising tide of communalism occupies an important chapter in the annals of our country. His basic political ideal of India's complete Independence, free from any foreign influence and control, and based on the long struggle of our great martyrs and freedom fighters, had inspired our young people to take active part in the country's movement for independence. An ardent liberal in all social matters, Sarat Chandra spared no effort to warn his countrymen against the evils of caste and untouchability and the danger of divisive politics. In fact, his long political career provides a saga of principled politics full of noble ideas, impatience for action and distrust of compromises.

* At the Sarat Chandra Memorial Lecture on *India at Sixty: Achievements and Challenges*, Netaji Research Bureau, Kolkata (1 September 2007).

As a visionary leader, Sarat Chandra Bose stressed on the basic fundamentals for the future Indian State and provided guidance in the nation-building efforts of India's post-Independence leadership. His ideals, no doubt, are still relevant in the context of our on-going endeavours for social, political and economic progress. He had great faith in pursuing scientific socialism as the means of integrated development of the country and was of the view that Indian State and all its activities must be imbued with socialistic commitment and that the workers and peasants must be given their due place in the political and administrative set-up.

In an attempt to mobilize the Left-oriented nationalist forces for the socialistic reconstruction of India, he vigorously worked towards setting up the 'Azad Hind Party' whose aims and objects, formulated by Sarat Chandra himself, underlined the essence of his concept of socio-economic framework of Independent India. The road-map which he presented for the country's socialistic reconstruction and democratic consolidation included—abolition of landlordism, complete repudiation of rural debt, encouragement of cooperative and scientific agriculture, nationalization of all basic and key industries, establishment of a Central Planning Commission for proper economic development, complete gender equality, guarantee of religious freedom, free compulsory education, right to claim food and shelter, and the establishment of a Union of Socialist Republics in India.

Sarat Chandra Bose was most vocal in his opposition to the partition of Bengal and in promoting Asian solidarity as an anti-imperialist mobilization. He resigned from the Congress Working Committee in protest against the acceptance of the proposal for the partition of India and presented an alternative plan for the creation of a United Independent Bengal, which bore testimony to his anxiety to maintain the unity of the people and the territorial integrity of the country. In fact, he visualized the Indian nation as a Union of Autonomous Socialist Republics, where provinces would be restructured linguistically and converted into autonomous Socialist Republics to ultimately form the Union. In a radically different world system, he wanted to develop unity amongst Asian nations in a wider perspective. He even proposed an international organization in South Asia on a regional basis in the form of the 'United Nations of South Asia' as a platform of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Burma and Ceylon.

Sarat Chandra's long association with the Media and his experience of political intervention through the Fourth Estate gave him a distinct identity among his contemporaries. It was under his stewardship that *The Nation*, a daily which was published from Calcutta became the mouthpiece of the people to raise their voice at a time, when the post-independence India was struggling to find a proper space in the comity of nations. This period also

witnessed the assassination of Gandhiji, emergence of different political parties and recurrence of communal disturbances. *The Nation* played a very constructive role in the backdrop of unfolding the political and social events that took place in the aftermath of the Transfer of Power and in the propagation of Sarat Chandra Bose's sharp and farsighted response to the contemporary national and international issues.

During the sixty years since our freedom and the adoption of our democratic structure, there have been several positive achievements as also many lost opportunities. The generation that witnessed the Transfer of Power and struggled to uplift the nascent nation from the mire of underdevelopment and poverty, no longer exists. With the onset of the global era, the new generation is faced with fresh challenges and enormous opportunities. It is in this context that today I have chosen to speak on 'India at Sixty: Achievements and Challenges', in memory of one of the country's most respected leaders, Shri Sarat Chandra Bose, who expended all his energies to secure and safeguard the interests of the people as a whole.

Six decades of freedom have seen India emerging as a nation of considerable strength, having grappled with several seemingly insurmountable problems and challenges, some germane to a new-born Republic and others being the baggage of its own history. We have made significant achievements in some areas while many other areas still need more focused attention. While we have largely succeeded in maintaining national unity and integrity and in consolidating our democratic institutions, we are yet struggling to provide better infrastructure, better living conditions, universal literacy, good health-care system, food for all and employment for all. Our society continues to be confronted with the tensions arising out of caste and communal divide, gender inequalities, inadequate job opportunities, growing corruption, lack of political consensus on vital issues concerning the nation and several others.

When India attained freedom in 1947, one of the biggest challenges before the framers of the Constitution was to identify a system of governance that could respond effectively to the vast array of diversities of our country as also the myriad socio-economic problems that the people were faced with in those tumultuous days. Our Founding Fathers finally adopted the system of parliamentary democracy, after purposive and elaborate debate, with the conviction that it best suited our ethos and culture and the specificities of our nation, particularly our multicultural identity and the developmental needs, where all the organs will work in harmony.

In laying the institutional foundations, the vision of the Founding Fathers has been substantially realized through a parliamentary polity, a multi-party

system, free and fair elections, independent Judiciary, free and vigilant Fourth Estate and an ever watchful citizenry.

This year we are completing six decades of freedom. Recently we observed the 150th Anniversary of one of the most heroic and epoch-making events in our struggle for freedom – our First War of Independence of 1857 and also the 60th year of our freedom. These are occasions to remind ourselves of the values that guided our Freedom Movement and of the numerous struggles and sacrifices of millions of our people led by visionary men and women, who, motivated only by the good of our country and not for any self-interest, plunged themselves into the long-drawn struggle, and in many cases, made supreme sacrifices.

Our struggle for Independence was not just a movement to achieve freedom from the bondage of the British Rule. It was as much a crusade to free ourselves from the various social evils and socio-economic iniquities and discriminations, to lift the deprived and the downtrodden from the mire of poverty and to give them a stake in the overall transformation of the country. Now, it is for us to introspect and see to what extent we have been able to realize the dreams of the Martyrs and the leaders of our Freedom Movement and of the Founding Fathers of our Republic. We should constantly ask ourselves what contribution we have made and can make to realize their dreams of a resurgent India and of an egalitarian society, free from class and caste exploitation and free from the scourges of poverty, illiteracy, lack of development, oppression and exploitation.

India at sixty, no doubt, has a mixed bag of achievements to its credit. Though the initial years after our Independence were marked by serious tensions and difficulties, we have emerged stronger from those trials and tribulations. But even after all these years since Independence, it is a tragic commentary on the nature of our development that one billion citizens of the country live in different centuries. We have islands of affluence, and alongside, we have poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of healthcare and basic infrastructure.

Undoubtedly, one of our most significant achievements of the first six decades of freedom, in many ways, to my mind, is that we have sustained a vibrant system of governance based on parliamentary democracy, committed to secularism and development based on planned economy. Today, having come through fourteen General Elections and experienced a good degree of political stability, no one would dispute that Indian Democracy has come of age and that it is well entrenched into our polity. Our people since the attainment of freedom have shown great enthusiasm for participation in the electoral and governance processes, and thereby actively helped in the establishment of the largest working democracy in the world. Today we can

confidently say that in laying the institutional foundations, the vision of the Founding Fathers has been substantially realized.

On the economic front, we have been able to make rapid strides in improving our economy at a fast pace with our sustained efforts. The Green and the White Revolutions that we have achieved, the commendable strides that we have made in the Space and the Defence-related fields, in scientific and technological research, in information and communications technologies, in the pharmaceutical and manufacturing sectors, in atomic energy, and others are matters about which we can be truly proud of. We have been witnessing consistently increasing growth rates for the past few years and have been acknowledged as a significant player in the world economy, all of which augur well for our future. Our achievements in various fields and our extremely talented human resources are factors about which we can be proud of. There is today a perceptible change not only in the world's assessment about India's future, but also in our own perception of a resurgent nation. Working within the framework of a parliamentary democracy, we have made significant strides in several areas of our national life.

On the social front, though we may have not been able to eradicate all the aberrations and drawbacks, we can certainly feel proud of addressing many age-old social problems and for laying the foundations for a modern and progressive society by enacting a large number of socially progressive legislations. The disadvantaged sections, women and children have been the focus of many a government intervention regarding their education, employment and protection from exploitation in order to empower them politically, economically and socially. A number of progressive legislations have been enacted to usher in the desired changes in our tradition-bound society. Our legislations to bring about land reforms, for effective democratic decentralization, for safeguarding the vulnerable sections against social discrimination, violence and atrocities, for ensuring to the citizens the right to information having a bearing on policy and administration, and for enhancing employment opportunities to eradicate rural poverty, among others, have contributed to a considerable extent in addressing several challenges before the country over the years.

Independent India has been one of the loudest voices in the comity of nations against imperialism and exploitation and in defence of the rights of the developing countries. The role and the space that India has come to occupy in the South Asian region, in the Commonwealth and in the world at large are matters that the world has taken note of. Even in the changing global environment today, India's concerns and perceptions cannot be ignored by the global community and India is rightly treated as a significant player in the contemporary world, both economically and politically.

But at the end of six decades of freedom, our society is still struggling with many complex problems that need to be resolved in a dedicated manner, going beyond legislative initiatives. We are still far away from realizing the many lofty goals set for Free India by our Founding Fathers. If sections of our population still go to bed in an empty stomach unsure of their next meal, we must recognize that we have major matters of primary concern to the people still left to be addressed. We need to seriously examine the gap between what we have achieved and our own potential and look into the factors that inhibit our growth.

Only through comprehensive development of the entire country can the fruits of economic growth be shared by everybody, particularly by those who have not benefited so far from six decades of planning. Though the removal of poverty is high on the agenda of governance, the scourge still continues with a substantial segment of our population still below the poverty line.

Poverty remains a blot on the collective consciousness of our times, when we have so much to celebrate about our material and technological advancements. According to the eminent agricultural economist Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, "poverty will persist under conditions where the human resource is under-valued and material resources are over-valued." Thus, it is important to recognize the need to bring every section of the population within the ambit of development.

Although the poverty ratio in the country has declined, the number of people below the poverty line still remains very substantial, with wide variations across the States. As the Magsaysay Award-winning columnist, Shri P. Sainath, observes:

> Our growth rate is the envy of many... .But the rate of decline of child deaths declined in the 1990s. ... India may have emerged the 15th biggest donor to the World Food Programme last year. But since the time we began that journey, we also added more newly hungry people than the rest of the world put together. It even saw a period when hunger rose in India and fell in Ethiopia... . The number of farm households in debt has nearly doubled in the years of the 'reforms'... . There is pride in the press over the rise of 'medical tourism'. But more than a fifth of our own people no longer seek health care of any kind. They just can't afford it.

Our health-care system should be able to cater to the needs of the people in the rural and remote areas with the benefit of modern medicine and science. We cannot afford to have medically unfit and malnourished citizens who cannot participate effectively in the development of the country. It is obvious that with the removal of poverty, there will be adequate facilities of education

and also comprehensive health care arrangements for the citizens. Thus, eradication of poverty should be the prime objective of all our policies and programmes.

We have raised the literacy levels from about 11 per cent at the time of Independence to around 65 per cent in recent times but we are still a long way away from our target of universal literacy. It is a matter of grave concern that our country is still home to the largest number of illiterates in the world. It is estimated that only 56 per cent of children in the age group of 5 to 9 years are attending the school. There are still large number of villages in our country without having even minimum educational facilities.

Another priority area which we should address is mainstreaming development and institution-building and comprehensive empowerment of all sections of our people so as to make our democracy more inclusive and participatory. Half of our population consists of women and due to various societal and historical reasons, they have not been able to participate equally in the process of development. Even after six decades of freedom, women's representation in our higher representative bodies is extremely inadequate and disproportionate. The literacy levels of men and women also show a wide disparity. Any plan for the development of the country cannot be successful if we do not make women equal partners in our nation-building endeavours.

Gender disparity in education, as prevalent in our country, substantially weakens its democratic fabric. According to the Planning Commission's National Human Development Report, 2001, the gender empowerment index was just 67.6 per cent in the early 90s, implying that women trailed by a third in human development indicators. There are many States in the country where gender indicators are worse than in sub-Saharan Africa. Such gender disparity is directly linked with gender inequality at the level of family and society. No doubt, the educational empowerment of our female population finds expression in the legal as well as programmatic framework of our national endeavour. Our Constitution is committed to providing compulsory education to all up to the age of 14 years irrespective of gender. The 86th Constitution Amendment Act, 2002 has made elementary education a fundamental right for all children in the age-group of 6 to 14 years. This apart, the National Policy on Education, 1986 and the Programme of Action, 1992 are the other guiding documents that focus on various aspects of women's educational empowerment. But unfortunately, the female literacy rate in our country is still strikingly lower than that of men.

Steps will have to be taken to ensure gender-parity in education by motivating the families and communities about the benefits of girls' education and by providing incentives to enroll and retain the girls in schools, otherwise

a major portion of our population will be prevented from adequately exercising their human rights and will be deprived of meaningful political and social participation. Democracy cannot thrive unless and until there is active involvement of men and women in politics and in different national activities and for that to happen, educational empowerment is the prime necessity.

To ensure that democracy is consolidated, our democratic institutions must function properly meeting the expectations of the people. Today, sadly, there is a growing disappointment and concern among sections of our people, particularly the youth, that democratic institutions of governance are not functioning as they should. While the public perceives a general decline in all our institutions of governance, it is the Parliament and the State Assemblies that have come in for strong criticism.

A recent study has indicated that already, in the first three years of the 14th Lok Sabha, 26 per cent of the Parliamentary time has been lost due to disruptions. During the Budget Session this year, the Lok Sabha lost a total of 73 hours (34 per cent of its scheduled time) due to frequent disorders. I cannot but express my great unhappiness that several important legislations, including the Finance Bill, had to be passed without debate and discussion. The situation during the current Session is no better. With each minute of parliamentary time costing the public exchequer, to the tune of about Rs. 26,000 such disruption is a great disservice to the country and to its democratic order.

Many well-meaning critics are pointing out that the health of the institutions that are supposed to guide the affairs of the nation and take it forward towards a better future is matter of concern today. As a distinguished commentator, Shri Inder Malhotra observed recently: "Sadly, over the last several decades, the decline of India's apex Legislature and thus of Indian polity has been serious, steady and apparently irremediable... . The budget of a billion plus people, was... passed without a single minute's discussion [in 2004]." He further added, "It is no exaggeration to say that there is a clear and present danger that if the current trends are not firmly checked, the Indian Parliament could be rendered totally ineffectual before long."

As has been observed in the 'Citizens' Report on the Governance and Development 2007' by Social Watch India, a non-official organization consisting of some Members of Parliament, well-known academicians and media persons as well as human rights activists: "rising contentious party politics of the country is increasingly being reflected in the proceedings of the Parliament. The parties and leaders, cutting across the entire political spectrum, consider protestations, which go much beyond what Ambedkar described as the 'grammar of anarchy', as the legitimate parliamentary activity and a genuine

and desirable extension of party politics outside the precincts of Parliament. This is a rational political activity from their perspective and not a deviation from the parliamentary norm. Thwarting legislative activity of Parliament forcefully, not necessarily persuasively, proving a point, as well as projecting a militant image of a crusader for people's cause is what really matters to them. ... The stalling of the functions of the two Houses was not intended even on a single occasion to develop a norm on any issue that created a blot on the MPs and on the sanctity of Parliament, each one was meant to score a political point. Even if contemporary politics creates a compulsion for protest politics in Parliament, whether this 'grammar of anarchy' should continue as the first instrument of politics, deserves a countrywide debate".

The recent confrontational politics have accentuated religious, linguistic and casteist divisions in the society and worryingly political power has largely got polarised around identities of caste, religion, and language, thereby making the political system the reflection of the existing social distortions and losing the essential national outlook. Parliament provides us with a forum where contentious issues can be discussed so that solutions can be found. For a country like ours, it is the ideal place for conflict resolution and conflict management. It is high time that issues of national importance occupied the centre-stage of our institutional politics and all political parties, working in tandem, should endeavour to resolve the divisive issues instead of contributing to reinforce them by their actions.

If we have to sustain our people's faith in the democratic institutions, we shall have to bring about integrity in our public life. The communalisation and criminalisation of politics has greatly vitiated our political system. The malaise of corruption and the influence of money and muscle power along with the use of religion in our electoral process and the resultant aberrations of our political functioning are matters that should engage the attention of all responsible citizens. Degeneration of the electoral system, as a result of the illegal and immoral practices used in many places for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity and contributing to the growing political apathy among the people. We need to seriously ponder and address the issues of corruption, criminalisation and the communalisation of politics, the vicious role being played by money and muscle powers, inadequate representation of women and, more significantly, growing signs of intolerance in our society shown by different segments. We cannot afford to get our youth disillusioned and skeptical about the efficacy of our democratic processes.

It is, therefore, high time all our democratic institutions began to demonstrate a better degree of sensitivity to the growing resentment among our people about the way all of them functioned. No doubt, it is on our

representative institutions, more than on any other organ, that the responsibility for sustaining people's faith in democracy rests. Representative institutions at all levels should come to be known for the quality and content of their debates and discussions and for their committed and sincere effort to respond to public causes, with sensitivity and devotion. The national Parliament as the apex body is invested with the responsibility to deliberate on issues of national importance and it is expected that those constituting it will be endowed with a national vision and that they will be instruments in helping to evolve a national perspective on all issues before the country, rather than using the forum of the Parliament to air regional and parochial issues. Their focus should be on promoting our Indianness, and thereby in strengthening the emotional integration of our people, as our Founding Fathers had visualized them to be. They should collectively focus on issues that unite us than on those that divide us from one another. The politics of disruption and confrontation can only perpetuate the mal-functioning of our democratic institutions.

Friends, while taking note of the worrisome trends, we should not lose sight of the positive indicators, when there are welcome signs that the democratic idea is beginning to transcend caste, creed and religious faith. It is through the crucible of democracy that the traditionally disenfranchised sections of society are acquiring a new voice and role in India's governance.

The Indian economy is one of the largest in the world today. But the various socio-economic indicators reveal that our growth pattern is not uniform for all the sectors. Socio-economic uplift of India's masses should not be an issue of political ideology or political rhetoric. As an issue having the greatest bearing on the quality of living of our people, this is the most crucial area warranting consensus across the political spectrum. It is necessary to have broad agreement on the imperatives of development. Unless the economic conditions, education levels and the quality of life of India's economically disadvantaged sections improve, we will not be able to sustain the momentum of economic growth for far too long.

In order to realize our full economic potential, it is important for us to recognize that the developmental challenge in India should not be reduced to one of making a choice between the imperatives of industrial development and the compelling need for agricultural growth. Our focus should be on helping the rural sector realize its own potentials by fruitfully using the gains of modern science and technology and industrial development as such. In today's developmental environment, it is not realistic to conclude that the development of rural India can be achieved relying exclusively on agriculture. What we need is an integrated development strategy which will take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the different sectors of our economy

and one in which the agents of development would intervene according to the need of each sector and the different regions of the country. Wherever possible, we should amalgamate industry and agriculture taking into account the imperatives of development and the possibilities and the resources that a particular region can offer. Without making use of the potentials offered by the industrial sector, with particular emphasis on areas like agro-based industries and the small and medium scale industries, rural sector will have only a stunted growth. If the objective of developmental planning is to ensure a good quality of living to all sections of the people, particularly to the rural masses, we need to have the willingness to review our own approaches and devise new ways wherever necessary.

The candid observations made by Prof. Amartya Sen merits mentioning here:

> We cannot reverse the economic predicament of the poor across the world by withholding from them the great advantages of contemporary technology, the well-established efficiency of international trade and exchange, and the social as well as economic merits of living in an open society. Rather, the main issue is how to make good use of the remarkable benefits of economic intercourse and technological progress in a way that pays adequate attention to the interests of the deprived and the underdog... the real issue is... the inequity in the overall balance of institutional arrangements which produces very unequal sharing of the benefits of globalization. The question is not just whether the poor, too, gain something from globalization, but whether they get a fair share and a fair opportunity.

We need to initiate programmes to address the problems of poverty, unemployment and underemployment on a war-footing, channelising the fruits of sustained economic growth in recent years in some areas, so that our common people also will begin to feel comfortable about the new developmental strategies and approaches we are adopting today. We are at present, one of the youngest nations in the world. Fifty-five percent of our people is below the age of 25. Only if this valuable asset is properly fed, nurtured, educated and remain healthy, will our country be able to occupy its prominent place in the comity of nations. Therefore, further consolidating our achievements in some of the cutting-edge areas of today, like the IT, bio-technology, communications, and fully exploiting the potentials offered by our enormous human resources and the fast strides on the frontiers of scientific, technological and managerial knowledge, we must prepare ourselves for addressing the challenges of the evolving world economy of which we are an integral part.

Over the years, our Parliament has come to be identified, both in theory and in practice, to be the pivot of our political system and has been instrumental, while respecting the sanctity of the Constitution, for ensuring that the fundamental law of the land kept pace with the changing needs of a growing society. In recent years, we have taken several initiatives to take the Parliament closer to the people. The setting up of the Parliament Museum, the introduction of a full-fledged, 24 hours Lok Sabha Television Channel, the creation of various Parliamentary Forums to ensure more effective involvement of the people's representatives in matters that require concerted national attention, particularly on issues that could have a bearing on the future of the country, more and more opportunities for discussions and interactive sessions with social activists, intellectuals, academia, etc. are all meant to ensure more effective interface between the civil society and the representative body of the people.

The expulsion of ten Members of Parliament in 2005 in the 'cash for query scam' was a watershed event in Parliamentary history across the world. Nowhere have so many elected legislators in a national Parliament been expelled for misdemeanour by a vote of the House. The three-month suspension of four Members of Lok Sabha in 2006 for their role in irregularities related to the MPLADS funds and the recent suspension of another member for misuse of facilities provided as a member, have demonstrated the resolve of the House to cleanse itself and to lay down new standards of conduct for its Members. These measures have won the people's resounding approval. However, that process of self-cleansing must continue and our citizens will be happy to note that the recent allegations against some members about their alleged role in human trafficking are now being investigated by a Committee of the House that has been set up.

Most unfortunately and rather alarmingly, issues like intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, confrontations and disrespect for dissent are increasingly vitiating our socio-political system. The cynicism that is creeping into the minds of the people, especially the youth, about the functions of our democratic structure is undoubtedly a matter of grave concern. The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. To my mind, we have to create a culture of commitment to democracy and democratic values such as equality, justice, freedom, concern for others' well being, secularism, respect for human dignity and rights.

Everyone associated with the system, particularly the Political Parties must demonstrate a culture of tolerance and respect for democratic values and help create conditions for the smooth functioning of our legislative institutions, which alone will undoubtedly restore their glory in public esteem.

Otherwise, the basic foundation of our constitutional system will be greatly shaken and will lose the faith and respect of the people, ultimately, giving rise to cynicism and tension, which cannot but weaken the entire constitutional edifice. In order to promote and further consolidate democracy, the Ruling and the Opposition Parties in Parliament and in the State Legislatures should see themselves as partners in the consolidation of the democratic process. Democratic institution-building is a continuous process which needs to be sustained by all stake-holders in a polity—its people, its institutions, with the leaders playing the most crucial role in it as role models for the people.

The educated youth have to be the crusaders for removing the various ills plaguing our society and to provide leadership to change the system for the better. It is of little use to be just critical of others for the aberrations or non-achievements in the society. The country has great expectations from its youth to bring in the freshness of their approach along with youthful energy and passion to address the imperfections in the institutions of democracy. They have to realize their obligations and have to participate more actively at all levels of political and other institutions.

The participative democratic structure and an open society, which we are enjoying today are the result of long years of struggle and sacrifice by our freedom fighters and generations of our leaders and the people. In order to preserve and further consolidate our freedom, we should be able to combat the forces and elements which are trying to vitiate our socio-political culture and undermine our institutions of democracy. As we are entering the seventh decade of freedom, I would call upon our people, particularly our youth, to come forward and make their contributions to further strengthen our democracy and our representative system. For us, there is no alternative to nor any substitute for our democratic structure based on the parliamentary system.

We have to strive together to ensure that the politics of confrontation and of intolerance that prevails in the country today give way to one of reconciliation and accommodation in the larger national interest. My earnest appeal to all institutions of democracy is to work together to correct this trend, thereby regaining the trust and confidence of the people. The media has an important role in this. Rather than becoming the prophets of doom and a factor in undermining people's faith in the institutions, it should be their endeavour to reinforce that trust. They would do well to remember that only in a democracy does a free media flourish. The market-driven competitive journalism can hurt the long-term interest of our political system beyond repair. Once democratic institutions lose popular trust, it can very well herald the beginning of anarchy.

Our democratic experience reveals that inspite of numerous challenges we have been facing on various fronts, parliamentary democracy in our country has exhibited a rare resilience and vitality. But we cannot lose sight of the fact that the problems before us are manifold. That being so, all stakeholders will have to unitedly work with dedication, commitment, cooperation and self-discipline to find lasting solutions to our problems so that we can safeguard parliamentary democracy from the tremendous strains experienced today and further strengthen it in the coming years.

Friends, Sarat Chandra Bose was one of the most reputed leaders of our country during the first half of the previous century. He was a great freedom fighter, an ideologue and a sterling patriot. He played a very important role in our national life and world affairs as well. He always believed in the unity and integrity of India. As a visionary leader, he presented a comprehensive framework for India's socialistic transformation which later became an essential part of the country's post-Independence democratic planning. His vision of Asian solidarity has, in fact, taken a practical shape with Asia beginning to play a significant role in the contemporary world affairs. Working with utmost sincerity for the furtherance of democratic values will be a befitting tribute to outstanding leaders like Sarat Chandra Bose who, like many other national leaders of his time, ceaselessly strove for making India a free nation so that it could flourish as a great democracy in the world.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again thank the Chairperson and other office-bearers of the Netaji Research Bureau for according me this opportunity to share with this august gathering my views on our society and polity as we are on the threshold of a new era. I wish them all success in their endeavours towards the furtherance of the lofty ideals and ennobling values which Sarat Chandra Bose cherished all through his public life.

RIGHT TO RECALL: A POTENT DEMOCRATIC TOOL TO ENFORCE ACCOUNTABILITY*

I am honoured to preside over the Host Branch Plenary Session on 'Right to Recall as a Strategy for Enforcing Greater Accountability of Parliaments to the people.'

As we all know, in representative democracies, Parliament and parliamentary institutions are always positioned, overarching the political horizon and constitutional set-up. It is through the institution of Parliament that the supremacy of the people is established in the governance and power structure of a parliamentary democracy. Each member of the Commonwealth is a democratic country with our respective Parliament playing a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of our peoples. In fact, Parliament symbolizes the urges, aspirations and expectations of the people and has multi-dimensional functions to perform. In the national context, Parliament is responsible not only for making laws but also for keeping a constant surveillance over the administration, for debating national policies and subjects of public importance and for ventilating people's grievances. In the global context, modern Parliaments have a paramount role to play in the furtherance of peace, prosperity and democratic values across the national boundaries.

The strength and effectiveness of Parliament as the supreme representative body depends, to a large extent, on the quality of its members whose obligations are many, and not always easy to reconcile. Each member of Parliament is accountable to the people who elect him, to the political party to which he is affiliated, and above all to the society and the nation as a whole. There are, therefore, a number of areas in which a parliamentarian has to discharge his responsibilities in consonance with the accountability he is supposed to secure as people's representative, not only while participating in passing legislations and approving policies and programmes but also while working as an intermediary between the people and the Government to articulate the grievances, needs and problems of those he represents.

Conventionally, and in certain cases as a matter of rule also, as it should be, the members of Parliament are required to adhere to a certain code of conduct in their dealings and behaviour. If they find any conflict between

* At the Plenary Session on *Right to Recall as a Strategy for Enforcing Greater Accountability of Parliaments to the People*, 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, New Delhi (28 September 2007).

their personal interests and public trust, they are morally bound to resolve that conflict in such a manner that their private interests are subordinated to the duty of their public office. They are not expected to involve themselves in anything that affects their own credibility and brings the institution of Parliament into disrepute. Uncompromisingly, they have always to maintain high standards of morality, dignity, decency and values in public life.

Rules regulating the conduct of the members of the Houses have always existed in our Parliaments, but they are typically confined to their conduct affecting parliamentary business, particularly the matters of internal order and decorum. Their behaviour outside the portals of Parliament is equally important because, from the point of view of their accountability to the people, they have to behave and respond to the needs of the electorate in a manner that the public confidence and trust in their own integrity and also the respect that the society accords to Parliament as the supreme representative institution are always maintained. By virtue of the oath or affirmation of allegiance taken by the members of Parliament when they are elected, they have a duty to uphold the law and to act on all occasions in accordance with the public trust placed in them. They also have a general duty to act in the interest of the nation as a whole, besides a special duty to their constituents. They must, therefore, observe the general principles of conduct in public life as applying to the holders of public office.

While casting their votes, the voters at large hope to achieve improvement in their living conditions, solutions to their problems at the local level and also the overall development of the country through their representatives. Implicitly, through the process of election, all the elected representatives give some sort of an express undertaking to the electorate, and through them to the nation, that they will discharge their duties to the best of their abilities. Such public responsibility requires all the members of Parliament to be true and faithful to the principles of parliamentary democracy, with complete dedication and commitment to the cause of their constituents all the time. That being so, in a parliamentary democracy, the competing demands from one's party and from the constituents make the public life of a member of Parliament very challenging.

Responsible and ethical conduct of the members of Legislatures, both inside and outside the Chambers, is a prerequisite for the success of a parliamentary polity. People expect that their representatives discharge their duties with commitment, sincerity and probity. It is a matter of great concern that, of late, in many democracies, people's perception of Parliament is changing and they are seen to be greatly disillusioned with the very relevance of parliamentary system, particularly when they find that the persons whom they have elected to represent them in the legislative bodies are not discharging

their duties in the desired manner. This not only results in loss of the precious time of the House, but also subverts the very process of legislative functioning, leading to incalculable harm to the reputation of democratic institutions. Sometimes, the legislators are found involved in activities which are unbecoming of the members of representative bodies and which tend to tarnish the prestige and image of the representative institutions.

Debates and discussions inside the Chambers of Parliament, which are the hallmarks of democracy, are being generally vitiated by disruptions, confrontations and other non-democratic alternatives. With the growing transparency in the system made possible by the application of new technology and the presence of an ever vigilant media, such actions of members of Parliament are exposed before an alert electorate. Several Parliaments have witnessed such acts of their members, which have led to a decline in public confidence in the standards of the supreme legislative body. Under the circumstances, it becomes imperative that every member of Parliament is made fully accountable for his or her actions and inactions.

As we all know, the people get disenchanted with their elected representatives ostensibly because of the deteriorating standards of their parliamentary behaviour. If such trends are not arrested at the earliest, people will lose faith in the functioning of parliamentary institutions, which will ultimately lead to the weakening of the very edifice of parliamentary democracy and all that for which parliamentary democracy stands will suffer. It is in this context that the people's 'right to recall', mid-term, an elected representative who fails to live up to the expectations of his constituents assumes significance as a potent democratic tool.

In fact, the power of 'recall' is based on the maxim that elected members of representative bodies should be accountable and answerable to their constituents throughout their term of office. If they are found to be incompetent, insensitive, corrupt or indifferent to their duties or indulge in activities unbecoming of that of a member of Parliament, both inside and outside, the voters should be in a position to demand their recall before the expiry of their term by presenting a petition to a designated authority. The 'recall' device has also the potential to encourage the citizens to keep themselves abreast of contemporary public issues in order to monitor the conduct of their elected representatives. In fact, a 'recall' petition may come up only when a voter is well aware of the various public issues that are handled by the Legislatures. The provision of 'recall', thus, can help in building an informed citizenry which, with its active involvement in public affairs, can also enthuse the kind of activism that is necessary for holding public office-holders accountable for their acts of omission and commission.

Whenever the members of Parliament represent their countries in various international fora, their representative character goes beyond the realm of their parliamentary duties *vis-a-vis* their constituents and the Parliaments to which they belong. In fact, on such visits abroad, be it on Goodwill Delegations to a sister Parliament or while attending International Parliamentary Conferences, he effectively functions as an ambassador and representative of his country, his people, and his Parliament. He is, therefore, expected to maintain the highest standards of conduct and dignity in his dealings and interactions during such visits. Any conduct on his part incompatible with his high status may incalculably tarnish the image of his country internationally. I am, therefore, of the view that any involvement in activities which are unbecoming of a people's representative while representing one's country abroad, should be one of the grounds on which a member of Parliament should be recalled.

Democracy today envisages a much bigger role for the citizenry, which in every country, is more educated and considerably more informed than ever before. The time is not very far when a more vigilant citizenry will demand much greater accountability from the representative institutions and their members. In that context, it is time for us to look for devices such as 'recall' to ensure accountability of the members of our democratic institutions at all levels, before the common man gets totally disillusioned with the prevailing system.

Realising the far-reaching impact of the 'recall' election device in strengthening public accountability mechanism that we have in place in each of our countries in the Commonwealth, we, the Host Branch, have proposed a thorough discussion on the subject, and accordingly, we are meeting here today in this Plenary Session. I hope, the deliberations here will enable us to understand the varied dimensions of this device and explore possibilities to empower the electorate in each of our countries with the 'right to recall' which they could use, if need be, against inefficient and irresponsible elected public officials. But, at the same time, we will have to be very pragmatic and unbiased in our approach to ensure that the 'recall' mechanism, if adopted in our democracies, is not misused to settle personal scores. I am confident that the discussion in this Plenary Session will enable us to come out with some concrete ideas on whether, under the prevailing conditions, we can adopt 'right to recall' as a strategy to enforce the accountability of our elected representatives in a more effective and meaningful manner.

Thank you.

CHALLENGES BEFORE FEDERALISM*

I am thankful to our Hon'ble Home Minister for his kind invitation to associate myself with this important Conference on Federalism and to Chair this Session. I wish to compliment the Government of India, which in partnership with the Forum of Federations, Canada, has organized this Conference dealing with different aspects of Federalism, with the theme of *Unity in Diversity – Learning from Each Other*, in this city.

We are happy that India has been chosen to host this Conference, which is being attended by a large number of dignitaries from different countries practising different shades of federal structure of governance, which will help the participants to share their experiences and exchange views on its different facets. This Conference will help us in learning from each other how different nations are serving their people by adopting different models of federal structure, through which they are seeking to bring about cohesion amongst diverse, even disparate elements in their respective countries.

India is the largest parliamentary democracy in the world and is recognized as one of the major countries with governance based mainly on the division of power between the different constituents of the governing structure, namely, the Centre and the States, following the basic principles of Federalism, though not declared to be a federation. The main theme of the Conference, *Unity in Diversity*, is the very kernel of India's political ethos. As a vibrant democracy and as the home of different religions, different languages, different cultures and regional aspirations, India has been endeavouring even prior to her Independence, to evolve a process of unity by bringing together the diverse elements, and now is considered to be the symbol of Unity in Diversity.

The classic definition of Federalism is of a constitutional structure, which contemplates and provides sharing of power between different entities within one territorial unit, with different areas of governance and with specified purposes. As India's Supreme Court has defined, the essential characteristic of federalism is the distribution of limited executive, legislative and judicial authority among bodies which coordinate with and are independent of each other. In such a set up, the supremacy of the Constitution is fundamental, in order to prevent either the Legislature of a Federal unit or those of the Member

* At the Fourth International Conference on Federalism, New Delhi (5 November 2007).

States from disturbing or impairing or even destroying that delicate balance of power, which satisfies the particular requirements of the States which are desirous of union but are not prepared to merge their individuality in a unity. In such a set-up, the primacy of the Constitution is protected by the authority of an independent judicial body to act as the interpreter of a scheme of distribution of powers. Thus, in a Federal structure, alongwith the supremacy of the Constitution, each unit and each organ has prescribed limits of function and demarcated powers as provided by the Constitution of the country. Thus Federalism is a constitutional mechanism of shared governance.

The themes chosen for discussion in the Conference, like, *Building and Accommodating Diversity; Fiscal Federalism; Interaction in a Federal Structure* and *Local Governments in Federal Systems*, concern every federal structure. They deal with important facets of Federalism and touch upon different issues that are of concern to a federal polity. I am sure the discussions in the work sessions will not only help in sharing information but will also throw up new ideas and methods of strengthening Federalism in the respective countries.

As Professor Ronald Watts puts it, 'by combining the elements of shared rule in larger units and self-rule in smaller regional units, federal political systems have provided the closest institutional approximation to the complex multicultural and multi-dimensional economic, social and political reality of the contemporary world.'

In my humble view, it is only in a democratic polity that there can be true application of the federal principles. Democracy is now accepted as the preferred system of polity in a majority of the countries around the world, with growing political awareness and greater political participation and involvement of the people in the structure of governance. Because of the people's desire and efforts for the preservation of their culture, language and identity-religious and otherwise—causing upsurge of regionalism and even of sub-nationalism, sharing of power is needed to maintain overall national unity and integrity.

Democratic governments are better equipped to maintain a cohesive polity amidst diverse interests and priorities. It is now largely accepted that the aspirations and longings of the people, for democracy the world over, coming from diverse religious, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds with regional issues and aspirations, can be more effectively met through a genuine federal structure which remains sensitive to the peculiarities of the diverse groups and interest. A federal polity properly conceived facilitates a structural and constitutional framework to accommodate such diversities and aspirations.

The establishment of a system conducive to the maintenance of diversity and promotion of equality should be the main concern of every democratic

society and it is incumbent upon governments today to recognize diversity and promote equality and fair deal through constitutional, legal and institutional means and mechanisms. Needless to say, politics of exclusion in any society, on any ground whatsoever, is detrimental to societal cohesion. Diversity and pluralism should be welcomed as strengths of a polity rather than as weaknesses. As federalism plays an important role in the proper control and management of diversity, it can substantially flourish only in a democratic set-up.

The generation of revenue and sharing them between the federal and State units taking into account their realities and experiences is one of the crucial principles of fiscal federalism and needs constant monitoring and review. It is imperative that proper modalities of revenue-sharing, accommodating the legitimate interests and aspirations of the federating units, is arrived at, so that friction which is likely to arise among the units relating to sharing of the revenue could be avoided or at least minimized. It is also imperative to provide for appropriate constitutional mechanism in order to have equal distribution of wealth, balanced development and for doing justice to the federating units, more so where regional differences are characterized by uneven development and multiplicity of political parties and pressure groups. It is essential that all fiscal issues in a federal set up are amicably resolved without jeopardizing national unity and integrity.

In India, responsibility in this matter has been assigned to two principal institutions, namely, the Planning Commission and the Finance Commission, which play an important role in assessing the requirements of the different States and in allocating the resources to them. The Commissions generally function well though there is scope for more satisfactory performance.

When occasions arise, there should be institutional mechanisms to mediate between the federating units on the one hand and between the units and the federal Government on the other, and that is of paramount importance for the successful working of a federal polity. What is essential is a proper and proactive response to the reasonable demands from the units, which will help in keeping the federal structure intact. In India, the Planning Commission, the National Development Council, the National Integration Council and the Inter-State Council, through periodic meetings between the States and the Centre, provide a good working system for resolving the issues. Bodies like the Inter-State Water Tribunals that we have also adjudicate water disputes among the riparian States. In this respect, to know about experiences of other countries will be helpful.

To my mind, the theme of *Local Government and Federal Systems* is of crucial importance. In a federal system, there are multi-tiers of government

generally with a pyramidical structure, which is sustained through proper devolution and decentralization of power. Concentration of authority and power only in the hands of the federal unit will be anathema to the whole system.

Our Constitution provides for sharing of power between the Union and the States and also within the States, through district and other local self-governing bodies. Administrative decentralization and also devolution of power provide true sustenance to a federal structure. Through landmark constitutional amendments, our Parliament has provided for grassroot institutions of governance, namely the *Panchayats* and the *Nagar Palikas* as important units of self-governance. The emergence of such bodies has substantially helped in the decentralization of power, which on its turn has helped in strengthening grassroots democracy and local participatory governance. In fact, the success of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India is a testimony to the success of the near-federal structure of India's highly pluralistic and diverse democratic polity.

In my humble view, the balanced development and progress of a democratic country can be hampered by an imperfect federal structure. The distribution of powers among the Centre and the States should not be preponderantly in favour of the Centre, while the States which have been given the responsibility to look after the needs and welfare of the people, are starved of minimal financial resources and adequate constitutional authority. Such a situation will result in an uneven development of the country and will give rise to feelings of alienation from the mainstream.

It is essential that in a federal country there should be proper planning process which should draw up priorities for devolution of adequate administrative powers and financial resources to look after important subjects like education, health-care, irrigation, creation of infrastructure, etc. which are usually assigned to the States or federating units. There should not be a feeling of discriminatory treatment between the federating units, which will only help in fomenting regionalism and may ultimately give rise to militancy and terrorism. True federalism does not contemplate over-centralization of power nor a hegemonistic attitude or manifestation of an arbitrary power at the federal level. In a country like India, with myriads of problems, with unequal development of the different units and areas having specific regional problems which are not common to the country as a whole, having special urges and aspirations of different groups of people, it is essential that its constitutional set-up contains the true aspects of federalism. Obviously subjects like external affairs, defence, communications, etc. are to be left with the Centre but meaningful and effective autonomy should be given to the States to frame their own policies, raise their own resources and make their own laws to meet their particular needs according to their capacity.

There are protagonists who talk of a strong Central Government in a federal set up while many are of the view that the States or the federating units should have their own areas of functioning and independent constitutional existence, with sufficient space to play important roles in the political, social, educational and cultural life of the people in their respective areas. The States or the federating units cannot be treated as mere agents or vassals of the Centre. In my view, a federal structure can successfully function under a Constitution, in which democracy and federalism are two of the basic features.

It is rightly said that strong States or federating units alone can make a country strong. A pluralistic society with a true federal structure has necessarily to reconcile the urges and aspirations of the people and the Centre and the States should consider themselves as partners in the important task of nation-building and in the maintenance of national unity and integrity. The people in the different regions should enjoy similar stage of development and the income of the citizens of the country should not vary from State to State and the identity of the different federating units should be respected.

If the Centre and the State can function without interference from each other in their specific areas, the basic unity and integrity of the country will be strengthened. Decentralisation of the administrative set-up down to the grass-root level can only assure the proper enforcement of the people's rights. Though India is not a federal set up in its truest form, the polity that we have has infused resilience and vitality into our democratic system and has provided a unifying force and cohesiveness to it and has contributed immensely towards national unity and integrity.

In a federal polity, the Centre has to be sensitive, responsive and accommodative towards regional aspirations and identities and in its role as the umpire, should be even-handed, fair and just while adjudicating claims and counter-claims between States and between the States and the Union. There are several issues which confront our polity like relations between the Centre and a State when two different political combinations are in power, imposition of President's Rule, role of Governors, uneven development among States, the rich versus poor States, sharing of resources, etc. These are very crucial issues which need to be seriously looked into to foster genuinely cooperative relations between the Union and the States and among the States.

The challenges before federalism today are many. But the basic lesson that we must always keep in mind is that we must remain united whatever may be the extent of diversity. While there can be no compromise on the question of sovereignty and integrity of the country, there should always be space for ethnic, cultural and linguistic pluralism to co-exist and flourish along with decentralization and devolution of power to the federating units.

An essential ingredient for the success of a federal polity is the concept of separation of powers. Each organ of the State—the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary must function within its respective jurisdictions as demarcated in the Constitution.

In this grand scheme of India's federal polity, Parliament, as the supreme representative institution of the people, is the fulcrum and the pivot. It is here that the hopes and aspirations of the people are articulated and policies and programmes are framed for the unity, integrity and development of the people and the nation as a whole. Parliament functions as the great integrating and cohesive force demonstrating a national vision to cement the federating units. As such, the institution of Parliament should be strengthened by all the stakeholders so that the federal polity itself is strengthened and all organs of State, the civil society and the media should play their due role.

I am sure the deliberations at this Conference, attracting participation at the highest level, from different parts of the world, will go a long way in defining and delineating the principles of a healthy federal system. I wish this Conference all success.

Thank you.

ISSUES BEFORE INDIA'S PARLIAMENTARY POLITY*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver a Lecture as part of the Lecture series instituted in the memory of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the tallest leaders and Chief architects of modern India, in this prestigious University, named after him.

As a premier institution of our country, Jawaharlal Nehru University is deservedly acknowledged as a centre of academic and intellectual excellence of the highest standard. It provides an eclectic mix of noted and eminent academicians and dynamic and promising youth. Having attracted bright young talents from different parts of the country, as also from various countries of the world, the University has added to the knowledge-base of our country by producing highly acclaimed academics, eminent scientists, administrators of high calibre and leaders of stature in different fields, including politics. Its remarkable teacher-student ratio, vast range of disciplines of study, inter-disciplinary approach and its many Study Centres being declared as 'Centres of Excellence' by the University Grants Commission—have all combined to make this University an exceptional Centre of learning, of which the whole nation is proud. The student community here is known for its active involvement in intellectual debates on issues of public importance along with their academic pursuits.

I compliment the Vice-Chancellor and the University Administration on organizing this Lecture on the *Status of Parliamentary Democracy in India* today, a topic of great contemporary relevance. The country had the great benefit to start its journey under the enlightened leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru during the defining years of its freedom, and a great line up of visionary and sagacious men and women provided effective leadership in the task of consolidating democracy and in laying the institutional foundations of our republic. Long before we freed ourselves of colonialism from our land, Jawaharlal Nehru, as President of Indian National Congress, in 1936, had declared that India's ultimate objective was 'the establishment of a democratic state', a sovereign state of India which would promote and foster 'full democracy' and usher in an era of a new social and economic order.

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* At the inauguration of the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture on *Status of Parliamentary Democracy in India* at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (14 November 2007).

Pandit Nehru was a democrat by instinct and temperament and contributed immensely towards inculcating the true parliamentary spirit and values in our people. Although he commanded absolute majority in the House, he never believed in steam-rolling the Opposition and always showed the utmost respect to them and listened to their views with rapt attention and tried to accommodate them as far as possible. He always recognized the due space of dissent in a true democracy, favouring healthy and constructive criticism, from all sections of the House. As you may be aware, some of his strongest critics in Parliament happened to be his greatest admirers and perhaps there cannot be a better compliment to Pandit Nehru's democratic credentials than this fact.

Throughout his years at the helm of affairs in the country, he strove ceaselessly towards the establishment of a tolerant, egalitarian and inclusive society in which all kinds of diversities could co-exist, drawing strength from each other and in the process strengthening our national fabric itself. The nation that he visualized was to be driven only by modern and progressive ideas and there was no room for pettiness and narrow-mindedness within that. Such a society is incomplete without the secular mosaic which Pandit Nehru ceaselessly strove to establish and which continues to be the hall-mark of our democratic polity today. His constant focus was on strengthening the emotional integration of our diverse population. In fact, belief in secularism and scientific temperament and a broad world-view were distinctive attributes of his personality. Under the liberal and modern education that he visualized for the country, there was no room for mixing mythology with science or for reason with faith in the pursuit of learning.

More than anything else, Jawaharlal Nehru was a builder of institutions. He believed that democracy was the best suited for a country of India's diversities and pluralities and to address the myriad challenges facing the nascent Republic with the active participation of the people. He had visualized a developmental model for the country in which the State, in partnership with the private initiative, whenever necessary, would play a significant role. According to him, in the formative years, the public sector establishments were to act as the engine of growth for the country and India's most important Public Sector Undertakings were founded under his inspiring leadership. Central to his vision was the acknowledgement of the primacy of the people and the fundamental rights of the citizens for a dignified existence, politically, socially and economically. He held the view that the full potential of the individual would be realized under conditions facilitated by the flowering of democracy. As he said once:

> We have definitely accepted the democratic process. Why have we accepted it? ... Because we think that in the final analysis, it promotes

> the growth of human beings and of society; because as we have said in our Constitution, we attach great value to individual spirit of man to grow... . We do want high standards of living, but not at the cost of man's creative spirit, his creative energy, his spirit of adventure... of all those fine things of life which have ennobled man throughout the ages. Democracy is not merely a question of elections.

The visionary statesman in him came out at its best when he, as the Prime Minister of India, sought to mobilize the exploited and the colonized peoples across the world, particularly in Africa and Asia, and provided a new non-aligned platform for them away from the destructive game of power-politics being played by the imperialist forces. These nations gained a new identity, self-respect and self-confidence under statesmen like Nehru and a few other like-minded leaders whom he mobilized.

One wonders how far over the years have we tried to live up to his dreams and hopes, the fulfillment of which would have given proper respect to his outstanding leadership and personality. I pay my respectful homage to his memory.

Friends, we have completed this year six decades of freedom and observed the 150th Anniversary of one of the most heroic and epoch-making events in our struggle for freedom—our First War of Independence of 1857. This year also marks the birth centenary of one of the greatest heroes of our freedom movement, Shaheed Bhagat Singh. We should remember the values that guided our freedom movement and the numerous struggles and sacrifices of millions of our people led by visionary men and women, who plunged themselves into the long-drawn struggle and, in many cases, made supreme sacrifices.

Our struggle for Independence was not just a movement to achieve freedom from the bondage of the British rule. It was as much a crusade to free ourselves from the various social evils and socio-economic iniquities and discriminations, to lift the deprived and the downtrodden from the mire of poverty and to give them a stake in the overall transformation of the country. It was with this larger national objective that a democratic polity, based on parliamentary system was established in the wake of freedom. Our Founding Fathers, visionary and sagacious as they were, perceived that such a system would respond effectively to the problems arising out of our vast array of diversity as also to the myriad socio-economic factors that we were faced with, when we achieved freedom through a massive people's movement after centuries-long humiliation of being a slave nation. With that objective, in the political system that we established, a place of pre-eminence has been given to our Parliament, the only organ directly representative of the people

and as such accountable to them, with very extensive powers which should rightly belong to the highest people's forum.

In our political system, as the body representing the free people of the democratic set-up, the Parliament rightly occupies the pivotal position. It is the vital link between the institutions of democracy and the people. It is in this great people's institution, constituted of their representatives, that the sovereign will of the people finds true expression. As such, the whole machinery of governance in the country is tuned to revolve around it. By the scheme of the Constitution itself, it is invested with the power, among other things: to make laws, to exercise control over the nation's purse, to make the Executive accountable to the Parliament, and when considered necessary, even to amend the Constitution, its own creator. Thus, if the Parliament does not function effectively, discharging its duties and obligations and the assigned role seriously, the whole machinery of our governance structure not only loses its robust effectiveness, but the very democratic set-up itself comes under enormous strain.

Over the past six decades, our people have shown to the world their commitment to work a democratic system in the country and have proven, time and again, that their political judgement cannot be taken for granted. They have been doing so by demonstrating exceptional prudence and uncanny wisdom in the exercise of their franchise. It is this quality that was reflected when they brought about changes in the central government six out of fourteen occasions that we went through the General Elections—in most cases, proving the political pundits and the astrologers wrong. In fact, every succeeding election has reflected a deeper commitment of our people to parliamentary democracy.

This democratic consolidation, preserving and protecting the unity of such a heterogeneous country with one billion plus people, practising different religions, speaking innumerable languages, and home to a wide variety of customs and practices, has indeed been a gigantic challenge that our people have largely met, to the envy of many. The first General Election of 1952 was the biggest free electoral exercise known till then anywhere in the world. As against 35 million voters in the election to the Provincial Legislative Assemblies that elected the members of the Constituent Assembly, the 1952 election saw 176 million voters. Today our democratic exercise involves nearly 700 million people.

As a free country working on democratic principles, India had to grapple with the challenging task of having to blend tradition with modernity, deeply entrenched customs with the laws, and to reconcile issues of divergent faiths with the demands of modern administration and governance. Over the years, through effective State intervention, we have striven with varying degrees of

success, to address the issue of the political, social and economic exclusion of a sizable segment of our population and of their empowerment by bringing them into our national mainstream.

Sustenance of a vibrant parliamentary democracy all these years, no doubt, has been one of our significant achievements since the attainment of our freedom, earning world-wide recognition. The Parliament, no doubt, has rendered great service by charting the path of social engineering with a great sense of responsibility.

It is through the Legislatures that the people in a representative democracy hold the Executive or the Government accountable to the people, which constitutes the most distinctive feature of a parliamentary system of Government. In fact, the very status of our Parliament in our constitutional set-up, its extensive powers, the various parliamentary devices like the Question Hour, the Zero Hour, Half-an-Hour Discussion, Short Duration Discussion, the Calling Attention Notices, the Adjournment Motions, the No-confidence Motion, the System of Committees, and even the Special Mentions, etc. are all meant to facilitate the Parliament in discharging the crucial function of ensuring executive accountability to the people at large through their duly chosen representatives.

To discharge its constitutional duties, it is essential that the Parliament functions smoothly and by the rules of procedure which are devised to facilitate its orderly functioning. To raise appropriately the issues of people's concern, their expectations, their demands, their fears, frustrations and anxieties before the House, to draw the Government's attention, and thus obtaining assurances from the Ministers on the floor of the Houses, it is essential for the members to follow strictly the rules of procedure and conduct themselves with the utmost sense of responsibility and with dignity and decorum.

The Question Hour has a special significance in ensuring Executive accountability to Parliament. It is during the Question Hour that the members can elicit information about the different aspects of administration and governmental activity which has a bearing on the day-to-day lives of the people. This is the most effective device to enforce executive accountability to the Parliament.

The Parliamentary Committees play a vital role in ensuring accountability in governance. A good deal of our parliamentary work is transacted by the Parliamentary Committees, which are treated as mini-Parliament. They play an important role in scrutinizing governmental expenditure and in overseeing policy formulation. In my humble experience, our Committee system functions with efficiency, professionalism, unity of purpose and commitment to the

larger national causes, as the hon'ble members usually rise above partisan considerations, in dealing with the matters before the Committees.

Today, however, unfortunately, after six decades of our Independence, we have come to a stage, nowadays, when questions are being asked about the utility and relevance of Parliament in our polity and, indeed, about the workability of our democratic set-up based on the parliamentary system as such.

Because of the competitive and confrontational politics that has overtaken the country today, the Parliament cannot appropriately discharge its essential functions. While the public perceives a general decline in all our institutions of governance, it is the Parliament and the State Assemblies that have come in, it seems justifiably, for strong criticism. Debates and discussions, the hallmarks of democracy, have been overshadowed by disruptions, confrontations and other non-democratic alternatives, which have made the great institution itself a subject of ridicule, inviting public opprobrium.

One would not be wrong to say that confrontational politics in our country have sharpened religious, linguistic and casteist divisions in the society and worryingly, political power has got polarised around identities of caste, religion, and language. In the continuous non-functioning of our Parliament, of late, people are beginning to see a pattern designed to undermine the system from within. To quote the eminent columnist Kuldip Nayar: Sometimes I wonder whether the political parties which stall Parliament and Assemblies are not targeting the system which demands some order and some accommodation. ... People are sick and tired of MPs not letting Parliament function.

Some sections within the Parliament and the State Legislatures are viewing many of our well-conceived parliamentary procedures as dispensable luxuries for our system. Of late, devices like the Question Hour are being seen as totally avoidable democratic extravaganzas. Forced adjournments of the House amount to the denial of opportunities to raise and discuss important issues in Parliament, thereby undermining the greatness and vitality of the most important constitutional institution, to the detriment of the people as a whole.

It is a matter of agony for the Presiding Officers that several legislations of far-reaching importance are passed by our Parliament without any serious discussions. The most glaring instance where the concept of executive accountability to Parliament is compromised is with regard to the management of the financial business of the Government, including the presentation, discussion and passage of the budgetary proposals, the Demand for Grants and others. There is a growing feeling of resentment and concern in the

country and justifiably so, when the Budget of a billion plus people is passed without any discussion, due to wholly unmerited disruption of the proceedings.

A recent study has indicated that in the first three years of the 14th Lok Sabha, already 26 per cent of the parliamentary time has been lost due to disruptions. During the Budget Session this year, the Lok Sabha lost a total of 73 hours (34 per cent of its scheduled time) due to frequent disorders. Only 11 of the slotted 25 Bills were passed in the recent Monsoon Session of Parliament. In that Session, the Lok Sabha lost 40 per cent of its time due to adjournments and the Rajya Sabha lost 49 per cent. As many as four Bills were passed without any discussion in the Lok Sabha. If Lok Sabha worked 124 hours in the Monsoon Session of 2006, it worked only 65 hours in the Monsoon Session of 2007. With each minute of parliamentary time costing the public exchequer, to the tune of about Rs. 26000/-, such disruptions, result in wastage of tax-payers' money and amount to a great disservice to the country and to its democratic order.

Almost all the leading newspapers in the country carried editorial comments expressing disapproval and concern about the non-functioning of our Parliament and in the premature end of the Monsoon Session this year. I share the excerpts from one of these comments with you:

> ...Walk-outs, slogan-shouting, boycotts, unruly scenes and adjournments have lost their sting. India's latest contribution to the regimen of parliamentary protest is scrapping of a session. The tragedy is that those 'manning' the institution are least bothered about the disrepute they consistently bring to what was once hailed as the temple of democracy. The compilation of hours and money wasted, the number of disruptions, the admonition from the Chair, etc. all add up to nothing. This is not merely shameful, it points to a shameless enemy within. So shameless that it remains immune to scathing criticism. ... our MPs have collectively created conditions in which the efficacy of a parliamentary system is being increasingly questioned.

I have quoted these comments, at the risk of inviting tedium, to convey the extent of the growing sense of dismay and criticism of the people about the way our institutions are functioning. Most alarmingly, intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, confrontations and disrespect for dissent are increasingly vitiating our socio-political system. Added to this is the attempt by some institutions to malign and marginalize important people's fora with an intent to occupy larger space than what is ideally feasible or constitutionally permissible in a representative democratic system.

The much talked about judicial activism of today is sought to be justified because of the perceived decline in the effectiveness of parliamentary accountability. It will do us good to remember that such frequent interventions with the exclusive jurisdiction of the Legislature will only contribute to further eroding the authority of Parliament. Not many seem to notice that once the Judiciary gets involved with an issue, which falls within the executive domain, it precludes the possibility of the Legislature exercising its assigned role of ensuring executive accountability through effective legislative scrutiny.

We need to introspect and realize that parliamentary democracy can be strengthened only if those who indulge in or abet in activities or behaviour incompatible with the established norms are made to account for such conduct individually or as groups, separating them from the institutions they happen to be associated with. It should be from this perspective that we need to seriously ponder and address the issues of corruption, criminalisation and the communalisation of politics, the vicious role being played by money and muscle powers and, more significantly, growing signs of intolerance in our society shown by different segments. There is today an imperative need for effective political polarisation around policies and programmes that are vital to all the classes and categories of our diverse population.

Today democratic India presents a contrasting picture of affluence and deprivation. On the one hand is the India of the rich, of those who have had the benefit of modern education and are intellectually and materially empowered and, on the other, is the India of those who live under conditions of poverty, deprivation, squalor, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices. With a stratified social structure, characterized by inequity, gender-based discrimination, lopsided development, regional imbalances, with a sizeable section living below the poverty line experiencing unemployment and underemployment, and with substantial sections of our people denied of the benefits of modern science and technology, without access to safe drinking water, dependable energy supply, and good health-care, we have to concede that we have not been able to take the fullest advantage of democratic governance in the past six decades. The polity fractured on religious, caste, regional and linguistic bases and influenced by confrontational politics is greatly weakening our democratic structure and simultaneously stifling the country's progress, and it needs serious attention and sincere national efforts to reverse the process.

Our democratic institutions can function effectively, as visualized by our Founding Fathers, only if more and more people come forward to identify themselves with the system and to address the imperfections within it. We cannot expect to accomplish this through any external agents. I felt quite encouraged to see some conscientious and responsible citizens organizing

themselves and coming out to express their anguish about and disapproval of the frequent disruptions in the proceedings of Parliament recently. I am sure, if more and more citizens come forward to voice their concern against the aberrations in the system, a salutary effect will be achieved. The educated youth and the intelligentsia have a great responsibility in this. It is of little use to be just critical of the incongruities and imperfections in the society.

The negative public perception of politics and of those in public life should not be permitted to affect the minds of the younger generations. Rather, they should be made to recognize that it is our collective and common responsibility to evolve ways and means to perfect our system of governance, rather than finding fault with it and running away from their responsibilities, expecting someone else to apply the correctives. Can anyone guard our democracy better than the citizens themselves?

Nobody talks of an alternative to or substitute for parliamentary democracy today. Therefore, with the realization that it is out of our Parliament, that the leadership that runs the affairs of our country emerges, we have to ensure that political workers, specially young men and women with commitment and dedication to the cause of the people, come into Parliament and actively participate in working the system. We must always remind ourselves that the country has a vested interest in having a robust and functional Parliament so that it remains strong with a pro-people and progressive governance structure.

As the Presiding Officer of the popular House of our Parliament, it has been my humble endeavour to help enhance its image before our citizens. In recent years we have taken several initiatives to take the Parliament closer to the people. The introduction of a full-fledged 24-hour Lok Sabha Television Channel and Parliamentarians' Lecture Series, the creation of various Parliamentary Forums to ensure more effective involvement of the people's representatives in matters that require concerted national attention, particularly on issues that could have a bearing on the future of the country; creation of more and more opportunities for the members to have discussions and interactive sessions with social activists, intellectuals, academia, etc. are all meant to ensure more effective interface between the civil society and the representative body of the people.

By expelling ten members of Parliament for their involvement in the 'cash for query' scam, and by suspending others for different periods for various misdemeanours involving them, the Parliament, I believe, has set an example before the country. But these positive initiatives are not projected properly to help enhance people's respect for democratic institutions in the country. The media, rather than becoming the prophets of doom and contributing to the loss of the people's faith in the institutions, should

endeavour to reinforce their trust in them. They would do well to remember that only in a democracy does a free media flourish. The market-driven competitive journalism will hurt the long-term interest of our political system beyond repair. Remember, once democratic institutions lose popular trust, it could very well herald the beginning of anarchy.

The cynicism that is creeping into the minds of the people, especially the youth, about our democratic structure, should be removed by the proper functioning of the people's most important institution, so that bright young citizens do not get disinterested about participation in public affairs and politics. All stakeholders in our democracy have to unitedly work with dedication, commitment, cooperation and self-discipline to find lasting solutions to safeguard parliamentary democracy from the tremendous strains experienced today, and on the other hand, strengthen it.

The question that we all, particularly, today's youth, need to ask ourselves today is, should we always be the beneficiaries of the system or should we not come forward to contribute to transforming the quality of our polity and making a positive impact on the socio-economic fortunes of the people. Attracting the right talents - the honest, well-meaning, public-spirited and educated youth - into the arena of politics and public life is an important challenge before our democracy today. Analysing the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire, the great thinker Gibbon said 'When the people of Rome wanted not to give to society, but for society to give them, when the freedom they wished foremost was a freedom from responsibility, then it was that Rome ceased to be free'.

Whether you like it or not, whether you involve yourself in it or not, politics decides your and your country's future. Doesn't it then make sense that you decide what your politics be and be proactive about it? If you remain on the periphery joining the national debates only to express your disapproval of the overall functioning of our democracy, you may only remain a passive spectator. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said 'When the *status quo* itself is rank injustice, those who desire to maintain it must be considered upholders of that injustice'.

Our youth and particularly the students have to take on the onus of addressing the aberrations and for removing the various ills plaguing our society and to provide dynamic and committed leadership to change the system for the better. Politics in the country today carries with it an image of intrigue, venality, disorder and anarchy. We need to correct it urgently so that our people begin to view politics as a respectable profession in the service of the society as was perceived during the long years of our struggle for freedom. Only the youth can help correct this image. Remember that only democracy gives you the power to participate in the political process, express

your opinion, and thus becoming a factor in bringing about positive changes in the socio-economic condition of the country.

I hope this University will continue to stand as a testimony to Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of an ideal University which is synonymous 'with humanism, with tolerance, with reason, with progress, with the adventure of ideas, with the search for truth and with the onward march of the human race towards higher objectives'. Those associated with this great institution should continue to pose the question that Pandit Nehru himself posed to them: '... if the temple of learning itself becomes a home of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation progress or a person grow in stature'? I am sure that the bright young students of this University will continue to maintain its great intellectual traditions and contribute to the solution of the problems faced by our people.

I convey my best wishes to you all on the Founders' Day of this prestigious University. Once again, I pay my homage to the memory of the great leader Jawaharlal Nehru, and wish to convey my sincere gratitude to the Vice-Chancellor, to the faculty and the students for giving me this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with this distinguished assembly.

Thank you.

PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGES AND RIGHT TO REPLY*

I feel privileged to have been extended this opportunity to initiate the discussion on the theme 'Privileges and Right of Reply', at this Conference. Privileges associated with membership in people's representative bodies have been a subject of discussion in democracies across the world. Parliamentary democracy, that was adopted in India for governance after Independence in 1947, is based on the inalienable rights of the citizens to equality before the law. The framers of India's Constitution did not contemplate conferring any greater rights on the members of Parliament *vis-a-vis* ordinary citizens except that it was accepted that without an adaptive and self-sustaining body of privileges and immunities from interferences, the Legislatures as well as the members individually and collectively would not be able to discharge their functions properly.

Privileges of Parliament are granted to members in order that they may be able to perform their duties in Parliament without any let or hindrance. They do not discharge the members from their obligations to the society which apply to him or her as much and perhaps more closely in that capacity, as they apply to other subjects. Privileges of Parliament do not place a member of Parliament on a footing different from that of an ordinary citizen in the matter of the application of laws unless there are good and sufficient reasons in the interest of Parliament itself to do so.

In article 105 of India's constitution, the privilege of freedom of speech in Parliament and the immunity to members from any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by them in Parliament or any committee thereof are specifically provided for. The article also provides that no person shall be liable to any proceedings in any court in respect of the publication by or under the authority of either House of Parliament of any report, paper, votes or proceedings. In other respects, however, clause (3) of this article as originally enacted provided that the powers, privileges and immunities of each House of Parliament, and of the members and the Committees of each House, shall be such as may from time to time be defined by Parliament by law, and until so defined shall be those of the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and of its members and

* At the 19th Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers' Conference, London (3 January 2008).

committees, at the commencement of this Constitution, that is 26 January, 1950. No comprehensive law has so far been passed by the Indian Parliament to define the powers, privileges and immunities of each House, and of the members and the Committees thereof and in the absence of any such law, they continue to remain in actual practice the same as those of the House of Commons, U.K., and of its members and Committees, at the time of the commencement of our Constitution. After its amendment in 1978, India's Constitution provides that the powers and privileges and immunities of each House of Parliament and of the members shall be, apart from freedom of speech, those as may be provided in law or as may have been in existence before the amendment.

Next only to the privilege and immunity of free speech within the House, the most important privilege of the House is the right of the House to regulate its own procedure, free from intervention by the Government or the courts. This has been stated to be 'the exclusive cognizance rule' from the earliest time. The House retains the right to be the sole judge of the lawfulness of its own proceedings and to settle or depart from its own codes of procedure.

Immunity to a member from any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by him in Parliament or any committee thereof, is an important privilege that goes with most representative institutions across the world. In addition to this, in India, each House also enjoys certain consequential powers necessary for the protection of its privileges and immunities. These powers are: To commit persons whether they are members or not, for breach of privilege or contempt of the House; to compel the attendance of witnesses and to send for persons, papers and records; to regulate its procedure and the conduct of its business; members or officers of the House cannot be compelled to give evidence or to produce documents in courts of law relating to the proceedings of the House without the permission of the Speaker; right of the House to receive immediate information of the arrest, detention, conviction, imprisonment and release of a member; exemption of a member from service of legal process, and arrest within the precincts of the House; and prohibition of disclosure of the proceedings or decision of a secret sitting of the House.

The power of the House to punish any person who commits a contempt of the House or a breach of any of its privileges is the most important privilege. Our Parliament is sovereign within the limits assigned to it by the Constitution. In the matter of judging the validity of its proceedings, the House has exclusive jurisdiction. Our Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, *inter alia* state: 'The House is not responsible to any external authority for following the procedure it lays down for itself, and it may depart from that procedure at its own discretion'. Articles 122 and 212 of India's Constitution

state that the validity of any proceedings in Parliament shall not be called in question on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure.

The question whether the Judiciary can interfere in matters of parliamentary privileges or not has been examined by the Indian Judiciary at different points of time in different situations and it has been recognized that a House of Parliament or a State Legislature is the sole authority to judge as to whether or not there has been a breach of privilege in a particular case. It has also held that the power of the House to commit for contempt is identical with that of the House of Commons and that a court of law would be incompetent to scrutinize the exercise of that power.

The Supreme Court of India, in a landmark judgment in 1970, in the case of *Tej Kiran Jain v. N. Sanjiva Reddy* reiterated the immunity of parliamentary proceedings from judicial interference in the following words:

The article [105 (2)] confers immunity *inter alia* in respect of 'anything said...in Parliament', the word 'anything' is of the widest import and is equivalent to 'everything'. The only limitation arises from the words 'in Parliament' which means during the sittings of Parliament and in the course of business of Parliament... . What they say is only subject to the discipline of the rules of Parliament, the good sense of the members and the control of proceedings by the Speaker, the courts have no say in the matter and should really have none.

These observations of the Indian court, largely reflected the views expressed in the celebrated and leading case on this point in *Bradlaugh vs. Gosset* (1883-84, QBD 271, 273-274, 278-86.) In this case it was held that 'The House of Commons is not subject to the control of courts in that part of the statute law which has relation to its internal procedure only. What is said or done within its walls cannot be inquired into in a court of law'.

Lord Coleridge C.J. observed thus: 'The jurisdiction of the Houses over their own members, their right to discipline within their walls, is absolute and exclusive. To use the words of Lord Ellenborough, 'They would sink into utter contempt and inefficiency without it'.

Stephen J. said:

> I think that the House of Commons is not subject to the control of Her Majesty's Courts in its administration of that part of the statute law which has relation to its own internal proceedings, and that the use of such actual force as may be necessary to carry into effect such a resolution as the one before us is justifiable.

The only purpose and justification for these privileges is that the representatives of the people should be enabled to discharge their responsibilities and duties to the people effectively and efficiently without any fear or favour and without any obstruction or hindrance.

Our Parliament has not yet enacted any law to define the powers, privileges and immunities of each House, and of members and the Committees thereof. In fact, the matter has been considered from time to time at the Conferences of Presiding Officers of our Legislative Bodies and various other fora. The main argument against the demand for codification is that parliamentary privileges are an integral part of the Constitution and, therefore, they belong to what is known as the 'fundamental law'. As the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has held, the provisions of article 105(3) emanate from constitutional laws and not ordinary laws made by Parliament or the State Legislatures and they are, therefore, as supreme as the provisions of Part III, which deals with the Fundamental Rights available to the citizens. It is also agreed that the parliamentary power to punish for contempt is more or less akin and analogous to the power given to the courts to punish for their contempt. Besides, it is felt that once these privileges are codified, the Legislature's power to put in place a new privilege or adapt the existing ones will be curtailed substantially. All the same, considering the seriousness of the matter and consistent demands from various quarters, I have referred the issue of codification of parliamentary privileges and related matters for the consideration of the Committee of Privileges of the House of the People, which is now seized of the matter.

As in the case of contempt of court, our Parliament also acts as the prosecuting as well as the adjudicating authority in contempt proceedings. Though the Rules of Procedure do not make provisions for giving opportunity to the person who is alleged to have committed an act of contempt for being heard before proceedings are finalized against him or her, in practice, we do allow, following the basic principles of natural justice, such persons to make submissions in their defence, before the Committee of Privilege.

As conferment of powers, privileges and immunities to individual members is for the efficient discharge of their duties and functions as the members of the Legislature, for proper discharge of his or her functions, a member has to act in an exemplary manner consistent with his position as the people's representative and he or she is necessarily obliged to conform to the highest standards of behaviour and decorum. The 'privileged position' of a legislator does not confer on him or her any licence in the discharge of his or her functions, in a manner inconsistent with the provisions of law or proper norms of behaviour. A legislator should be a role model and as such should not misuse his or her powers and privileges, both within and outside

the House. The Legislature concerned has the right to take action against any erring member for acts of impropriety or misdemeanour being inconsistent with the privilege of a member and even to terminate his or her membership of the House by way of expulsion.

Recently, the House of People in India had the unfortunate experience of taking action against several of its members for acts of impropriety in the discharge of their duties and functions. As the Speaker, I appointed a Committee consisting of members of different political parties in the House to look into the complaints against the members concerned. The Committee went into the matter in great detail and after giving full opportunity to the members concerned, held them guilty of misconduct. On such finding, the House passed a Resolution for their expulsion, which decision was subsequently challenged by them before the Supreme Court of India, which, after elaborate hearing, upheld the right of the House of People to expel its members. Thus, a member enjoys privileges and immunities only so long as he or she conducts in a manner consistent with the duties and obligations of an elected representative and can lose the membership of the House if he or she commits breaches of the same. This example also emphasizes the importance of the rights and privileges of the House as a whole in the matters of the discharge of its onerous duties and functions as an elected body.

While speaking of parliamentary privileges, the pre-eminence of Parliament in our parliamentary polity and the privileges extended to its members, I would like to emphasize that the various provisions of our Constitution set out the philosophy of separation of powers along with a well laid out Scheme of checks and balances. The Constitution defines clearly the respective jurisdictions and mutual relationship among the different organs of State in intent, purpose and area of activities.

Separation of powers with the system of checks and balances is one of the characteristic features of our constitutional scheme. Our institutions of governance have been intentionally founded on the principle of separation of powers as a bulwark against tyranny of any or more organs of the State and the Constitution does not give any unfettered power to any organ and all the three principal organs are expected to work in harmony. Parliament exercises political and financial control over the Executive, and there are inherent checks and balances to keep every organ within the limits of constitutional power. Commenting on the nature of separation of powers delineated by our Constitution, one of our most eminent Judges, Chief Justice B. K. Mukherjee, in the Supreme Court, in *Ram Jawaya Kapur v. State of Punjab* (AIR 1955 SC 549), observed: 'Our Constitution does not contemplate assumption, by one organ or part of the State, of functions that essentially belong to another'.

The Legislature has been accorded a pre-eminent position in our constitutional and political set-up, with power *inter alia*, to make laws, to exercise control over the nation's purse, to make the Executive accountable to the popular House, and when considered necessary, also to amend the Constitution. But obviously the Legislature has to function within the parameters laid down by the Constitution.

The framers of our Constitution took infinite care to provide for an independent and impartial Judiciary as the interpreter of the Constitution and as the custodian of the rights of the citizens through the process of judicial review, which gives the mandate to the Judiciary to interpret the laws but not to make them, nor to lay down general norms of behaviour for the Government or to decide upon public policy. The scope of judicial review is confined to the enquiry as to whether an impugned legislation or an Executive action falls within the competence of the Legislature or of the Executive authority or is consistent with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution or with its other mandatory provisions.

Chief Justice, S.R. Das, in the famous case of *A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras* (1950 SCR 88) made it very clear:

> "Although our Constitution has imposed some limitations ... [it] has left our Parliament and the State Legislature supreme in their respective legislative fields. In the main, subject to limitations ... our Constitution has preferred the supremacy of the Legislature to that of the Judiciary... and the Court has no authority to question the wisdom or policy of the law duly made by the appropriate Legislature ... and this is a basic fact which the Court must not overlook."

The Hon'ble Supreme Court has itself construed that the concept of separation of powers is a 'basic feature' of the Constitution. Each organ of the State has separate areas of functioning, into which no other organ can enter or intervene, unless permitted by the Constitution itself, and if it so does, it will be contrary to one of the 'basic features' of our Constitution.

There have been occasional disputes between the Legislature and the Judiciary on different issues. In recent years, however, we have witnessed several instances when parliamentarians and legislators have pointed out that the Judiciary has been encroaching into the legislative and executive domain. The judicial overreach has come in for criticism even from some learned Judges as well as of some eminent members of the legal fraternity, who felt that in the name of judicial activism, the Judiciary was tending to upset the fine constitutional balance which envisaged harmonious relations among the organs of State. As the Speaker of Lok Sabha, I have reiterated Parliament's pre-eminence in the constitutional scheme and in one instance,

had to direct my Secretariat not to accept a notice which was issued by the Court. In fact, the subject of Legislature Judiciary relationship was deliberated in the Conferences of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India where we, while reiterating our stated position on harmonious relations, stressed the need for each organ to scrupulously operate within its constitutional jurisdiction. Recently in December 2007, the Lok Sabha held a structured debate on the issue of and need for harmonious relationship among the Legislature, Executive and the Judiciary.

Fellow Presiding Officers, as regards the question whether there should be a 'Right of Reply', Parliaments across the world have upheld the convention that no allegation shall be made against a person who is not present in the House to defend himself.

Some Commonwealth countries have introduced a 'right of reply' scheme to provide a form of redress for persons who believe their names have been unfairly taken in Parliament. The schemes involve a procedure whereby such a person has an opportunity to have a response by him incorporated into the parliamentary record. In most Commonwealth Parliaments, the procedure does not involve the Privileges Committee deciding the truth of the statements made in the House or in the citizen's submission. The procedure was adopted first in the Australian Senate in 1988, and later, modelled on it, in the Parliament of New South Wales and in the Legislative Assemblies of Queensland, Western Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory. Recently New Zealand has adopted a similar system.

The Indian situation comes close to the UK's practice. I understand that the Procedure Committee of UK's House of Commons while recognizing the advantages of a system which proved 'a clear and relatively uncomplicated method for an aggrieved person...to secure a rebuttal which enjoys something approaching the same prominence as the original allegation' and thought it 'might conceivably deter some members from making wholly unfounded remarks damaging to individuals, without formally proscribing their right to do so', was not convinced of the need to follow the Australian practice in this regard.

The Joint Committee of the Houses of Parliament, UK, (1998-99) regarding parliamentary privileges, after studying the Australian practice and after considering the merit of the proposal in detail, came to the conclusion that the introduction of such a system of right of reply was not necessary in UK. The Committee felt that the 'introduction in this country [UK] of such a novel form of parliamentary procedure would suffer from the drawback of raising expectations that could not be fulfilled. Simply to publish the text of any reply would mean that the truth or falsity of the criticism would not be

established. No financial redress would be forthcoming. The statement itself, even if published in Hansard, would not necessarily attract publicity matching the original comments. Moreover, as a matter of principle, statements by non-members ought not, in any event, to have the benefit of the absolute privilege accorded to the official record of parliamentary proceedings.' It further added, 'when attacks are made, it is not the case that individuals have no right to respond at all. They are not precluded from defending themselves robustly outside Parliament, and the media are ever watchful over members' conduct.' Therefore, the Joint Committee concluded that, 'taken cumulatively, for the Westminster Parliament the drawbacks of a right of reply scheme outweigh the advantages' and accordingly recommended that a right of reply scheme should not be adopted.

In our country, the legislative intent behind the provisions of article 105 is that speech and actions in the Parliament may be said to be unquestioned and free; however, this freedom does not extend to any unrestricted license of speech on the floor of the House. Similarly, our Rules of Procedure and Directions by the Speaker have provisions to check unsubstantiated allegations and derogatory references by members and expunction of unparliamentary expressions. For example, the Speaker may, at any time, prohibit a member from making any allegation if he is of the opinion that such allegation is derogatory to the dignity of the House or that it does not serve any public interest. Rule 353 of the Rules of Procedure provides that no allegation of a defamatory or incriminatory nature shall be made by a member against any person unless the member has given adequate advance notice to the Speaker and also to the Minister concerned so that the Minister may be able to make an investigation into the matter for the purpose of a reply.

The crux of the matter is that a member should be fully responsible while making an allegation and he has to satisfy himself that the source is reliable and allegation is based on facts. In effect, he is required to make *prima facie* investigation into the matter before he writes to the Speaker or the Minister, and more so before he speaks in the House. I would like to add that the Chair may also *suo motu* object to the allegations being made where these are made without following the prescribed procedure. In appropriate cases, the member may be asked to withdraw them or the Chair may, in exceptional cases, even order the expunction of the allegations from the proceedings.

As regards complaints and imputations against Ministers and members, when both the member who made the allegations and the member or the Minister against whom those allegations have been made stick to their respective versions and are prepared for an inquiry being held by the Speaker, they may be asked to adduce such evidence as may be in their possession in support of their statements. Similarly, as a convention, when a member makes

an allegation in the House against a Minister or a member without giving advance notice, provisions of the rule on the subject are invoked and the member is called to order, and where any such allegations have gone on record, the Minister or member concerned against whom allegations have been made is allowed, if he so requests, to make a statement in the House clarifying the position either on the same day or later on and that brings the matter to an end.

It may also be mentioned here that where allegations are made in the House against a particular political party, the leader or the Chief Whip of the Party or Group in the House is permitted to make a statement in regard thereto. The member desiring to make the personal explanation is, however, required first to submit to the Speaker the text of the statement to be made by him. He can make the statement if the Speaker, after going through the statement, accords him the permission.

As I mentioned earlier, as a rule, our Presiding Officers do not permit making of casual allegations against persons who are not present in the House to defend themselves. Whenever a citizen feels aggrieved that his name has been brought in debate with a view to slandering, defaming or criticizing him, he may write to the member concerned giving him facts with a request to make necessary corrections in the House. He may also write to the Minister concerned giving him all the facts and the Minister may, after such investigations as he deems fit, make a statement in the House clarifying the position. While the Minister can refute the allegation made in the House by a member against an outsider, he cannot read the statement furnished to him by the individual. The aggrieved person can also make a representation to the Committee of Petitions of the House placing all the facts before it, and the Committee, after examining the case in all its aspects, may make a report to the House. It is open to the House to take such further action as it deems fit. An aggrieved citizen can also make a factual statement in the Press or circulate it to members of Parliament for their information. Where a public servant feels aggrieved by anything said in the House, he may, through proper channel, bring to the notice of the Minister concerned whatever he has to say in this regard. Thereafter, the Minister, if he considers it necessary, may, with the previous permission of the Speaker, make a statement in the House.

Thus, on the one hand, our parliamentary system provides for freedom of speech to the legislators while, on the other, it ensures that members themselves should conduct with a sense of responsibility while making charges and allegations against those who cannot defend themselves on the floor of the House. Even though we have not incorporated the right of reply in our parliamentary system, we have ample mechanisms to make sure that the

citizens can bring to the notice of the representative bodies their position in respect of the allegations made against them. The various provisions that I have mentioned work as a deterrent against unsubstantiated allegations being made against any one. I am sure the distinguished Presiding Officers from Australia, as also from other Commonwealth Parliaments where they have provided for right of reply, will inform us of the procedure in this regard and how they have worked in practice during the discussions.

Excellencies, I am confident that the discussions to follow will give us a deeper insight into the varied dimensions of this important theme.

Thank you.

MAKING REPRESENTATIVE BODIES MORE EFFECTIVE: ROLE OF WHIPS*

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to be in the midst of the distinguished gathering of Whips of our Parliament and of the State Legislatures. I am thankful to Shri Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, for his invitation to address this Valedictory Session of your Conference. I convey my greetings and good wishes to all of you for the efforts that all of you are making, representing the different parties and groups in Parliament and the State Legislatures, to make our representative bodies functional, so that they are able to discharge their duties in a manner consistent with the obligations imposed on them by our Constitution and the people. I am sure the deliberations that have taken place during the Conference on various agenda items would go a long way in reinforcing and enriching the edifice of our parliamentary democracy.

I understand that the Conference deliberated in detail on the recommendations of the Thirteenth All India Whips' Conference held in Hyderabad in 2005. Some of the recommendations pertaining to subjects like, the duration and sittings of the Parliament and State Legislatures, constituting of Consultative Committees, implementation of assurances, maintenance of Quorum in the House, among others, are of crucial importance for the effective and smooth functioning of our democratic system. I trust that you have had meaningful discussions on all these issues.

Friends, the democratic form of government has been acknowledged to be the most successful scheme of governance throughout the world, primarily because of the representative character of its institutions and of their pre-eminent position in the governance structure. No one in our country has suggested any substitute to Parliamentary democracy, as our Constitution has provided, nor is there any better system for us. Thus, the elected representatives who represent the will and the aspirations of the people in the highest Legislative Bodies, must spare no effort to ensure that the responsibilities entrusted to them are fulfilled in fullest measure.

The smooth and orderly conduct of the business of our Legislative Bodies is necessarily of great significance. Dignified conduct of the members of our

* At the Valedictory Session of the 14th All India Whips Conference, Mumbai (5 February 2008).

Legislatures, both inside and outside the Chambers, is a pre-requisite for the success of parliamentary democracy. I understand that one of the important issues that came up before the Conference was about the frequent disruptions in both the Houses of Parliament and State Legislatures. On many occasions, interruptions lead to pandemonium, with members coming to the well of the House, shouting slogans, even indulging in physical attacks, interrupting others from speaking and totally disregarding, if not even deliberately insulting, the Chair, causing forced adjournment of the scheduled business resulting in loss of the precious time of the House, which subverts the very process of the functioning of our Legislatures, thereby, undermining people's faith in them.

Very often, the Question Hour too is disrupted. The significance of the Question Hour lies in the fact that it is a crucial tool in ensuring Executive accountability to the Legislature which is the cardinal principle of the parliamentary system of government. Since the Question Hour is also the source of the most authentic information in respect of many policies and programmes approved by the legislators themselves, it becomes the responsibility of all members to safeguard the sanctity of the Question Hour for the effective functioning of our parliamentary system.

In recent years, the issue of discipline and decorum in our Legislatures has been deliberated on different occasions in various fora. The All India Conference of Presiding Officers, Leaders of Parties, Ministers of Parliamentary Affairs, Whips, Parliamentarians and Legislators on 'Discipline and Decorum in the Parliament and State Legislatures' held in September 1992, had resolved that the political parties should evolve a code of conduct for their legislators and ensure its observance by them. We had reiterated our commitment to preserve and enhance the prestige of our representative bodies at the Special Session of Parliament held to mark the Golden Jubilee of our Independence in August 1997. At the 64th Conference of Presiding Officers held at Chandigarh in June 2001, we had in-depth deliberations on the need to evolve a code of conduct for legislators and steps to contain frequent adjournment of the Legislatures on account of interruptions. Another All-India Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies, Chief Ministers, Ministers of Parliamentary Affairs and Leaders and Whips of Parties, convened in November 2001 in New Delhi, also deliberated on the issue. After I assumed the Office of the Speaker in June 2004, I had convened two meetings of leaders of all political parties in Parliament first in November 2004, and again as recently as in August 2007, to discuss this very important issue.

All of us, as stakeholders in our parliamentary polity, should be greatly concerned about the falling standards of parliamentary behaviour. As we all well know, scenes of unruly conduct attracts adverse public comments and

we cannot lose sight of the fact that the loss of people's faith can damage our democratic polity. All of us must acknowledge that disturbances and forced adjournments should never be used as tools for articulating concerns on issues, howsoever grave they be.

A recent study has indicated that till the 11th Session of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, 21 per cent of the precious parliamentary time had been lost due to disruptions. With each minute of parliamentary time costing the public exchequer to the tune of about Rs. 26,000/- such disruptions result in the mindless wastage of taxpayer's money and do a great disservice to the country and to its democratic order. To address this colossal waste, as the Speaker of Lok Sabha, I meet Leaders of Political Parties in Parliament before each Session, to seek their cooperation for the smooth conduct of the House and to facilitate amicable resolution of situations of stalemate and impasse.

Being the custodians of the interests of the entire nation, the conduct of the legislators has to be exemplary and must conform to the highest democratic traditions. Our *Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha* provide norms of ethical behaviour for members. There is now a greater need to safeguard ethical standards in public life which underscores the greater relevance of effective Ethics Committees in our Legislatures for ensuring good and responsive behaviour of the legislators.

Friends, coalitions seem to be the order of the day in many democracies, including ours and at present, our polity is going through a coalition era. We have at the Centre a coalition Government representing various political parties. In the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, we have 36 political parties representing different ideologies and varying shades of political opinion. In such a scenario, we must appreciate the crucial role which Chief Whips and Whips will have to play in making the Legislative Bodies work smoothly and successfully. The role of Whips assumes considerable importance in the matter of arriving at a consensus or in coordinating, the decisions of the different parties on major issues of national importance. In fact, it is recognized that the Chief Whips are the eyes and ears of the leaders of the party. As in Lok Sabha, several of our States have a large number of political parties represented in their Legislatures. In such a scenario, it is highly beneficial that the Whips of political parties meet periodically and make a review of their roles and responsibilities and strive together to strengthen democracy and our parliamentary institutions.

I find that one of the important items on the Agenda for consideration was about devoting a full day in a week exclusively for general discussion on issues raised by members. What is of utmost importance in this regard is that the given parliamentary time is utilized to the fullest. Practices and

procedures are not and should not be static and stagnant, just as democracy and its institutions are constantly in a process of evolution. Parliamentary institutions and its procedures should evolve depending on the emerging situations and evolving conditions. Presiding Officers and Whips of Parties in particular should all endeavour to streamline the practices and procedures followed in our Legislative Bodies.

I fully concede the need for extending technological support for our legislators in the discharge of their important function. Considering the demand on their time from varied quarters, legislators cannot find adequate time to garner information on diverse subjects which come up for discussion in the Chambers and the Committees. Our Legislative Bodies should strive to provide adequate support to members in this regard.

We have in our Parliament the Members' Reference Service which provides factual, objective and latest information to the members within the time stipulated by them. The information requirements of members are assessed keeping in view their multiple functional roles as a legislator, as member of a Parliamentary Committee or of a Parliamentary Delegation visiting abroad or as a Delegate to an International Parliamentary Conference or Seminar. The working of Parliamentary Committees can also be improved greatly by providing the right research inputs. For an effective research or information support system, it is imperative to have a modern and reliable library. I would suggest to the State Legislatures, which do not have a good library, to take the initiative to have one. Report writing in the Committees is the other important area where requisite research and study support can be a handy tool for objective analysis of subjects under scrutiny.

To be of assistance to our legislators in being effective elected representatives, we have started a Lecture Series in Parliament to enable the members to benefit from the considered views of experts on issues of contemporary parliamentary or national importance. Such Lectures have proved to be highly useful as they provide a sound insight to our parliamentarians into different topical issues of national concern.

I would also like to refer to the Parliamentary Forums, which we have set up in 2004-05, to provide a platform for exchange of ideas on issues and developments in some of the critical areas so as to equip the members with more information and specialized knowledge. I am sure, by providing such research and study support, we shall be enabling the members to discuss and raise those issues more effectively on the floor of the House and in turn we would get more meaningful inputs in policy formulations from our elected representatives.

To make available, objective and reliable information and authoritative data on a continuous and regular basis to the parliamentarians, a large number of index-based database of information is made available on the Parliament of India Home Page. Now, with the provision of computers to members, offices of political parties and officers of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Secretariats, the dissemination of up-to-date information has become quicker and that too without involving much paper work. Many State Legislatures have already followed suit and I hope many more will make full use of the application of information technology in their day-to-day functioning.

Over the last few years in Parliament we have developed the Standing Committee System, which by and large is working very satisfactorily. I am happy that the Committees are doing extremely useful work and the most important fact is that the system is strengthening our democratic functioning of the Parliamentary set-up. As we have all noticed, the reports of the several committees are mostly unanimous which shows a non-partisan approach being taken by the members in the discharge of their functions in the Committees. Except for the purpose of converting Ordinances into Bills and except in extremely special circumstances, all the Bills introduced in each House of Parliament are referred to the Standing Committee for consideration and report and it has been noticed that the Government by and large accept the changes proposed by the Committee. I hope this attitude pervades in the functioning of our Parliamentary System as a whole, which will make it more meaningful, more effective and a true representative Institution of the People.

We are proud to belong to the largest working Parliamentary democracy in the world. Our democratic heritage has given us sustenance not only since independence but even from the days of Emperor Ashoka the Great and it is well-known in history that the basic democratic tenets were scrupulously followed by the former rulers in great measure. That principle continued throughout the Moghul period and during the days of Akbar, we have information about regular interaction between the Emperor and the people through which the Emperor kept himself informed about the problems faced by the people and about their needs. We are proud to be part of that heritage. It is our duty to strengthen and make it more functional. With a view to acquaint our members as well as our citizens of the development of the democratic ethos in our country which has been followed for centuries, we have now in our Parliament Complex, a Parliament Museum, which has started functioning from 14 August 2006 and was inaugurated by the then President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, depicting the evolution of democratic principles in our country, with many things presented through the multi-media.

Parliament Museum is now acclaimed for providing exciting presentation of our past heritage and includes all the requisite information about our struggle for freedom, about the repression by the foreign rulers, about the great leadership provided by the Father of the Nation and other leaders and how our country achieved its independence and also about the functioning of our democratic institutions like the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and also other organs of the State, namely, the Judiciary and the Executive. We are proud to provide such information through the Parliament Museum to the people of the country and I am happy to inform you that a large number of children and also visitors from abroad have seen the Museum and acclaimed it as one of the most well-organized and impressive ones.

We have also introduced the Lok Sabha Television for faithful reporting about whatever transpires in the Chamber of Lok Sabha. It was felt that for strengthening Parliamentary democracy it is essential that the people of the country at large, who have constituted the Lok Sabha by electing their representatives as Members, should have the right to know what was happening inside the House, how the members were behaving, what laws were passed, what issues were discussed, amongst other things. We have regular stream of visitors, who face considerable inconvenience these days to come inside the House to see the proceedings from the visitors' gallery. In view of the interest of the citizens of the country to know what is happening inside the House, we have in fact extended the visitors' gallery to the whole country and now people can see through the L S TV the Lok Sabha proceedings in full, if they so choose. During the time when there is no Session or the House is not working, very important programmes are organized to highlight issues and problems faced by the people and to find out solutions therefore through discussion on important issues and to present exhilarating cultural shows and I am happy to inform you that the Channel is becoming more and more popular. It is a matter indeed of pride that since its inauguration in July 2006 it has been able to attract the attention of the people of the country generally. It is pertinent to mention here that it is the only such parliamentary television channel in the world, totally and independently managed by the Parliament itself. I am extremely grateful to the Hon'ble Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Information and Broadcasting, Shri Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi for introducing the relevant amendment in the Cable Network law of our country and making it mandatory for all the cable operators to make available the Lok Sabha TV Channel in their network.

I feel that, in view of the fact that the people of this country are entitled to know what is happening in the Parliament and that nothing should be kept out of the reach of the people generally, except matters of high security of the gravest nature, we are enjoined by our Constitution to function openly. Now that the proceedings of the Parliament are being telecast and people

come to know of the same through the electronic media, my request to all the Hon'ble Members particularly the Chairmen of the Committees, is to allow the proceedings to be open at least to the media, so that a very substantial part of the functioning of the Parliament can be made available to the people. Earlier, I had mooted this proposal before a meeting of the Hon'ble Chairmen of different Standing Committees but at that time my proposal did not meet with general approval. I would request the Chief Whips and Whips of different Parties to persuade their Parties and the Chairmen belonging to different Parties and Groups, to allow media coverage of the proceedings of the Committees, of course subject to the discretion of the respective Chairmen. In my view, this will bring Parliament nearer to the people, who elect the members. This system is in vogue in countries like the U.K., U.S.A. and others.

Friends, all of us, owe a duty to our nation to uphold and strengthen Parliamentary democracy. Our only connection with Parliament is as representatives of the people. We can justify our presence in the House for our actions or inactions by the role we play inside the House and also outside. I sincerely feel that all the members of Parliament and Legislatures should be role-models. It is their duty to dedicate themselves to the service of the people and sincerely and seriously try to uphold the basic postulates of democratic behaviour and to serve the people. Both, those in the Government or supporting the government and also in the Opposition, should conduct themselves in a manner which strengthen the great edifice of a democratic State. We should not indulge in anything which invites people's contempt, ridicule or opprobrium. Therefore, I earnestly appeal to all and the Whips in particular that we should justify the faith that the people have shown in their elected representatives for serving the cause of the people generally.

I feel the leaders and members of different parties should identify some important issues as national issues having considerable bearing on the lives of the people and the affairs of the nation and it is my appeal to the Whips of all Parties to arrive at a consensus to select some such issues, and to find time to discuss the same for finding out solutions, without any attitude of confrontation based on partisan consideration.

Hon'ble Whips, ours is the largest democracy in the world and our Legislative Bodies are required to play a key role in shaping the destiny of the nation. Our Legislatures symbolize the urges, aspirations and expectations of our people and have varied roles to play. Besides law-making, they are responsible for keeping a constant watch over the administration, for debating policies and subjects of public importance and for giving expression to people's grievances. As such, the success and effectiveness of these deliberative bodies greatly depend on their orderly functioning and also on the adherence to the

highest standards of discipline, dignity and decorum. I solicit cooperation and support from all of you, who are Chief Whips and Whips, for the smooth running of our Legislative Bodies and for better management of their precious time. I am confident that the deliberations at this Conference will prove to be immensely productive and purposeful for all of us.

I would like to take this opportunity to heartily compliment the Hon'ble Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Information & Broadcasting and also the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs on successfully organising this Fourteenth All India Whips' Conference. I trust that this Conference will be an important step, among other things, towards ensuring decorum and discipline and smooth conduct of proceedings in our Legislative Bodies and thereby in helping to enhance our people's respect for democratic institutions in our country.

Thank you.

INDIA AT SIXTY—AGENDA FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver this Lecture in memory of Comrade Lokanath Choudhury, an outstanding social worker, an eminent socialist and a humanist to the core, who had an abiding dedication and unwavering commitment to the cause of India's poor and the deprived. At the outset, I would like to take this opportunity to pay my respectful homage to the memory of Late Lokanath Choudhury. I also compliment the Lokanath Choudhury Memorial Trust for organising this Lecture series to honour a leader who was endowed with deep humanism and social and intellectual sensitivity.

Comrade Lokanath Choudhury, always championed the cause of legitimate rights of the downtrodden millions of the country in general and Orissa in particular. It was his personal encounter with Comrade Bhagabati Panigrahi, the Founder Secretary of the Communist Party of Orissa, which proved to be a turning point in his life, completely changing his outlook and approach towards society and politics. His life was an inspiring saga of service and sacrifice for the people, particularly the landless, the tenants, the fishermen and the share-croppers. He played a prominent role in the Zamindari Abolition Movement in Orissa and emerged as a mass leader of the State. A three time Member of the Orissa Legislative Assembly representing his home constituency, Kujanga-Erasama and a member of the Ninth and the Tenth Lok Sabhas, Shri Choudhury was a popular leader and a pillar of strength for his party, within Orissa and outside. His address in the Lok Sabha in March 1993 movingly describing the pathetic plight and agony of the people of Kalahandi, Koraput and Bolangir districts of Orissa urging the Government to take concrete steps to alleviate their problems, was an eye-opener for all-concerned. His sensitive portrayal of the crisis in those areas had its immediate positive fall-outs, as the Government came forward to pay proper attention to the problems of the people of those affected districts of Orissa.

Comrade Loknath Choudhury's mission was to unite the people against oppression, injustice and exploitation. It was his firm conviction that unless and until the people are awakened and sensitised about their genuine rights and struggle against injustice, the development of the country will remain a

* At the Lokanath Choudhury Memorial Lecture on *India at 60*—An Agenda for Inclusive Development, Bhubaneswar, Orissa (8 June 2008).

distant dream. He had an unshakable faith in the validity of scientific socialism as the means of the socio-economic transformation of the country and firmly believed that the weaker sections of the country must be given their due place. He was also a staunch advocate of secularism and spared no efforts in mobilizing people against sectarian and communal forces and in favour of participatory democracy and inclusive development for the benefit of all sections of our people.

With utmost respect to the ideals and vision that leaders like Comrade Lokanath Choudhury pursued all their lives and keeping in view the growing demand from vast sections of our people for a legitimate share in the fruits of growth taking place around them, I have chosen to speak today on, *'India at 60—An Agenda for Inclusive Development'*.

There is no doubt that during the last sixty years, our country has made remarkable progress in many areas. We have succeeded by and large in preserving national unity and cohesion in spite of various provocations, though we still need to do a lot more to strengthen our democratic values and institutions. The nation as a whole should endeavour as a national priority to ensure that the benefits of development, universal literacy, good health-care and better infrastructure, reach all sections of our people. In that endeavour, we must rise above regional, caste, linguistic and religious divide which is greatly hampering the uniform development of our country and enjoyment by the people of their legitimate constitutional and legal rights as citizens.

When India achieved freedom in 1947, one of the stupendous challenges before the framers of our Constitution was to identify a system of governance that could address the social, religious and ethnic heterogeneity of our country as also the multifarious socio-economic problems that the people were faced with during that turbulent period. Convinced that the system of parliamentary democracy is best suited to our ethos, culture and specificities, our Founding Fathers finally opted for it.

Our struggle for Independence was not just a movement to free our country from the shackles of colonial rule. It was as much a crusade to free ourselves from the various social evils and socio-economic problems, to lift the deprived and the downtrodden out of the mire of poverty and to give them a stake in the progress and prosperity of the country. Now, it is for us to ponder and see to what extent we have been able to fulfil the dreams of the martyrs and the leaders of our Freedom Movement and of the Founding Fathers of our Republic. Their dreams of a new India, free from class, caste and religious exploitation and the ill-effects of de-humanizing poverty, illiteracy and socio-economic oppression, still remain to a great extent unfulfilled.

One of our most remarkable achievements of the first six decades of freedom is that we have not only sustained but also reinforced a vibrant system of governance based on parliamentary democracy, committed to secularism and inclusive and equitable development in spite of desperate attempts at times to weaken it. But, because of our people's commitment and active participation, democracy has come of age and is flourishing and thriving in our country. Since Independence, our people have shown tremendous zeal and enthusiasm for participation in the electoral and governance processes, and thereby have greatly helped in the establishment and strengthening of the largest working democracy in the world and they have never ultimately surrendered themselves to forces of disruption and reaction.

So far as our economy is concerned, we have been able to make substantial progress by reason of our sustained and diligent efforts. The Green and the White Revolutions that we have achieved, the enormous strides that we have taken in the Space and the Defence-related fields, in scientific and technological research, in information and communications technologies, in the pharmaceutical and manufacturing sectors, in atomic energy, and others are matters which justifiably make us proud. We have been witnessing consistently increasing growth rates for the past few years and have been acknowledged as an emerging economic power. Our impressive achievements in diverse spheres and our huge reservoir of talent are also positives about which we can take legitimate pride. On the social front, though we have not been able to stamp out myriad evils, it is also a fact that many entrenched social problems and prejudices have been addressed and have laid the foundations for a modern, egalitarian and progressive society. The weaker sections, women and children have been the beneficiaries of several positive government initiatives regarding their education, employment and protection from exploitation in order to empower them. A number of socially progressive legislations have been enacted by our Parliament and the State Legislatures to usher in a just society uninfluenced by the narrow consideration of caste, creed and religion.

But at the end of six decades of freedom, our society is still grappling with several complex problems that need to be tackled with sincerity and commitment. We are still far away from realizing the many cherished goals set for Free India by our Founding Fathers. If sections of our population still live in abject poverty, we cannot remain apathetic and complacent and must realize that we have major matters of primary concern to the people still left to be addressed. We need to seriously examine the gap between what we have accomplished so far and our own potential and ponder the reasons which has impeded our growth in the past and which continues to hold us down. Only with an effective strategy for inclusive development can the

fruits of progress accrue to all. It is important to ensure that all sections of our population benefit from progress and that the fruits of progress are not allowed to be cornered by a small segment. Large sections of our people do not have access to a good health-care system. With the growing pressure of population the existing system is very badly over-stretched. Recent studies indicate that more than a fifth of our population are not able to benefit in any manner from the modern medical science infrastructure. Medically unfit and malnourished and under-nourished citizens cannot participate effectively in the development process of the country.

Our literacy levels which stood at about 11 per cent at the time of Independence has gone up to around 65 per cent in recent times but our target of universal literacy is still to be achieved. It is a matter of ignominy for our country that we are home to the largest number of illiterates in the world today. It is estimated that only 56 per cent of children in the age group of 5 to 9 years are attending schools in our country. There are even today a large number of villages in our country without any educational facilities. Only less than 10 per cent of our university-eligible youth have real access to higher education. Needless to say, it reflects very poorly on our nation that even after six decades of freedom, about one-third of our population are denied even the basic education and only an insignificant minority have access to quality education.

Another priority area which we cannot ignore is mainstreaming development and institution building and comprehensive empowerment of all sections of our people, particularly the women and the socially and economically backward sections, who have not been able to receive the fruits of progress all these years. Thus it is crucially important to make our democracy more inclusive and participatory. Half of our population consists of women and due to various social and economic reasons, they have not been able to participate equally in the development processes. Even after six decades of freedom, women's representation in our higher representative bodies is woefully inadequate. Similarly, the literacy levels of men and women also show a wide disparity. Any plan for the development of the country cannot be a success if we do not make women equal partners in the task of nation-building. To start with, we have to take initiatives to ensure gender-parity in education, by motivating the families and communities about the absolute necessity of girls' education and by providing incentives to enroll and retain the girls in schools, otherwise a substantial segment of our population will be prevented from exercising their rights and will be deprived of meaningful political and social participation.

Sustenance of democracy largely depends on the involvement of men and women in politics and in different national activities and for that to happen, educational empowerment is an essential pre-requisite, together with the entry of more and more women in our representative bodies by appropriate affirmative action including legislation. I hope the revived interest in the proposed legislative initiative will be pursued to its logical conclusion and an effective legal remedy will be in place soon to ensure the due representation of women in our higher representative bodies. A large section of our population are looking forward to it with interest today and it is my hope that during my tenure as the Speaker of Lok Sabha, the law will be enacted.

The recent years have aggravated religious, linguistic and casteist divisions in society and political power has largely got polarised around primordial identities of caste, religion, and language, thereby making the political system the reflection of the existing social distortions and losing the essential national perspective. Without vibrant and functional Parliament that represent and reflect a true-pro-people approach, we cannot hope to evolve a national approach towards our developmental challenges.

It is time all our democratic institutions began to demonstrate a greater degree of sensitivity and responsiveness to the growing disenchantment among our people with different aspects of our national life, particularly our political life. The national Parliament as the apex body has the responsibility to deliberate on issues of national importance and it is expected that those constituting it will rise above narrow sectarian interests and will be instruments in helping to evolve a national perspective on all issues before the country. They should collectively focus on issues that unite us, rather than on those that divide us.

If we have to sustain and reinforce our people's faith in the democratic institutions, we shall have to realise the imperative of integrity and honesty in our public life. The cancer of corruption and the influence of money and muscle power along with the use of religion in our electoral process and the resultant aberrations of our political functioning are matters that should worry all responsible citizens. We need to seriously think about and address the issues of corruption, criminalisation and the communalisation of politics, the vicious role being played by money and muscle power, inadequate representation of women and growing signs of bigotry and intolerance in our society. Divisive and sectarian politics will have to give away to a broad-based national political agenda.

Even after many decades of our economic planning and political maturity gained in the sphere of governance, millions of our people have still not been emancipated from the vicious cycle of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, poor

health care, gender-based prejudices and other economic and social infirmities and specially so in the case of the disadvantaged and marginalized sections and religious minorities whom the fruits of progress have not accrued to the extent they should have.

The 8 per cent more GDP growth in our economy has not percolated to the grass-roots level. Globalization, whose benefits, if any are still limited, may seem unavoidable and perhaps we cannot ultimately avoid integrating with the world economy, but that process should include within it the fulfilment of the aspirations of India's masses. Providing employment with reasonable wages, shelter, drinking water, electricity, schools, hospitals and connectivity to the common people and in a comprehensive manner, should continue to be the focused approach of our governance structure.

Growth in any liberalising and globalising economy and particularly ours must lead to a better quality of life for the poor. As Professor Amartya Sen, while talking of globalization and poverty has said:

We cannot reverse the economic predicament of the poor across the world by withholding from them the great advantages of contemporary technology, the well-established efficiency of international trade and exchange, and the social as well as economic merits of living in an open society. Rather, the main issue is how to make good use of the remarkable benefits of economic intercourse and technological progress in a way that pays adequate attention to the interests of the deprived and the underdog...the real issue is the distribution of globalization's benefits... The central issue of contention is not globalization itself, nor is it the use of the market as an institution, but the iniquity in the overall balance of institutional arrangements which produces very unequal sharing of the benefits of globalization. The question is not just whether the poor, too, gain something from globalization, but whether they get a fair share and a fair opportunity.

The people have the inalienable right to enjoy the basic freedoms, which are an integral part of life of the citizens in any developed country as also their entitlements as citizens in a democracy. To my mind, nothing more calls for a greater fervour than the desire and need to provide one billion Indians with the freedom to engage in a productive life and gain the consequent rewards, not only as an individual but also for the society and the nation, and for that purpose we need to formulate programmes to tackle effectively the problems of poverty, unemployment and underemployment on a war-footing, channelising the fruits of sustained economic growth in recent year.

To bring about an inclusive society, we have to create conditions for political freedom to co-exist with economic freedom and distributive justice. We need to give priority to the issues concerning our common people, specially the rural poor so that they come to occupy the centre-stage of all our

developmental policies and programmes. It is important to ensure that our economic and social policies are responsive to the people's needs and aspirations. The success of the economic and social measures can be achieved if they result in eradication of poverty and removal of deprivation, so that the objective of building a socialist and secular country can be realized when all the people, irrespective of their caste, creed and religion, will have equal rights and opportunities.

It is extremely essential that the political parities should develop a culture of tolerance and respect for dissent and democratic norms and help create conditions for the smooth functioning of our legislative institutions, which alone will restore their glory in public esteem, otherwise, it will only give rise to cynicism and disenchantment among the people. It is essential that the issues and problems of national importance should be identified and dealt with not in a partisan and confrontationist manner but in a spirit of co-operation for the sake of the people and for the consolidation of the democratic structure. It is the attitude of co-operation in resolving major issues in a spirit of partnership which will reinforce the democratic process in our country.

Our well-measuring and committed youth have to play a crucial role in putting an end to the various ills and problems staking our society and to provide leadership to change the system for the better. It is of little use to be just critical of others for the aberrations and distortions in our system and society. The country has great expectations from its youth for it is the youth who can bring in the freshness of their approach along with exuberant energy and passion to address the imperfections and weaknesses in the institutions of democracy. They have to realize their obligations to the country and have to participate more actively at all levels of political and other institutions.

The participative democratic structure and an open society, which we all cherish today are the result of protracted years of struggle and sacrifice by our valiant freedom fighters and generations of selfless leaders. In order to make our democracy more inclusive, we must spare no effort to combat the forces and elements which are trying to vitiate our socio-political culture and undermine our democratic institutions. As we are entering the seventh decade of freedom, I would urge all, particularly the youth to come forward and make their meaningful contributions to further strengthen our democracy and our representative system and help to build a just and inclusive society by totally eliminating all trends of divisive and communal politics and uprooting corruption comprehensively from our body politic and society as a whole.

The agenda for India should now be to strive together to ensure that the politics of confrontation and of intolerance gives way to one of reconciliation

and accommodation in the larger national interest. I would appeal to all institutions of democracy to work together to correct the imperfections and thereby regain the trust and confidence of the people. The media has an important role in this regard. My friends in the media should remind themselves that only in a democracy does a free, fearless and unbiased media flourish. If democratic institutions indulge in non-issues and become inert to issues concerning everyday problems of the people, the loss of people's faith will lead to anarchy and chaos causing irreparable damage to our country.

Despite numerous challenges and problems we have been facing on various fronts, our political system has exhibited a rare resilience, strength and vitality. But we cannot lose sight of the fact that the problems before us are manifold and grave. That being so, all stakeholders will have to unitedly work with dedication, commitment, cooperation and self-discipline to find lasting solutions to our problems so that we can safeguard our democracy and build an inclusive and equitable society.

Friends, Comrade Lokanath Choudhury was a respected leader, a committed social worker, an ideologue and a sterling patriot. As a visionary leader, he presented a comprehensive framework for India's socio-economic transformation. I am sure, his life will continue to inspire the coming generations of our country.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again thank the Chairperson and other office-bearers of the Lokanath Memorial Trust for according me this opportunity to share with this august gathering some of my views on issues of contemporary relevance. I wish them all success in their endeavours towards the furtherance of the socialistic and secular values for which Comrade Lokanath Choudhury stood all through his illustrious life.

Thank you.

DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver this Lecture in memory of respected Comrade, Late E.M.S. Namboodiripad, an outstanding mass leader and one of the tallest thinkers and theoreticians of modern India as also of the Communist Movement in the country, on the occasion of his birth centenary. At the outset, I take this opportunity to pay my respectful homage to the memory of Comrade EMS who personified the finest traditions of public life and of the Left Movement in the country. I heartily compliment the Institute of Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Kerala, on organizing this Lecture Series.

Comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad was one of the greatest Communist leaders, of our country, whose commitment to the cause of the deprived and the downtrodden remains unparalleled. Endowed as he was with a sharp and deeply analytical mind and very well-read on the liberal and the communist literature, he was a rare combination of an original thinker, a pragmatic theoretician, an unrivalled leader of the masses, a sensitive social activist and a reformer and an idealist to the core. With exceptional intellectual ability, he dedicated his life to the cause of the nation and the common people. It speaks volumes of his remarkable commitment that though born in a caste-ridden feudal society, Namboodiripad broke the shackles of his high-caste aristocratic origin and fought against the numerous societal evils and obscurantism of his times.

Comrade EMS was drawn into the Freedom Movement right from his college days. The demonstrations following the arrest of national leaders and freedom fighters during the salt *Satyagraha* roused national fervour in young Namboodiripad. The January of 1932 saw him leave the college to take the final plunge into the Freedom Movement and he remained actively involved in the picketing of foreign cloth shops, as part of the policy of boycott announced by the National Leaders. He was one of the chief inspiration for and among the Founder Leaders of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 and later, in 1937, he formed the first Unit of the Communist Party of India in Kerala. From that time onwards, he dedicated his life to the Communist

* At the E.M.S. Namboodiripad Memorial Lecture on *Democratic Consolidation: The Indian Experience*, Thiruvananthapuram (13 June 2008).

ideology, till his last breath, and applied it to understand the peculiar conditions of Indian society in general and of Kerala in particular.

Comrade EMS was a pioneer and path breaker in every sense of the term. Convinced that the impetus for social reforms should come from within the community, he actively associated himself with the *Yoga Kshema Sabha*, an organization floated by the Brahmin youth to fight against the regressive customs prevalent in society. Interestingly, Namboodiripad's early endeavours at social reforms included a campaign to liberate women from various retrograde customs. He also helped to launch the agitation of the Ezhavas in Kerala against the taboos enforced on them by the upper classes. True to his belief and conviction, he always remained a guiding light in bringing about societal transformation in Kerala.

The election of a Communist Party government under his leadership in 1957, through the democratic electoral process, the first ever of its kind in the history of Communist Movement world-wide, was a watershed event. That, in a way, marked the beginning of the unravelling of the so-called 'Kerala Model', in the political and economic lexicon. Comrade Namboodiripad was committed to the cause of the people and to the furtherance of democratic values all his life. It was under his dynamic leadership that the Communists committed themselves to the democratic way of functioning. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, who held the portfolios of Law, Home, Prison and Administration in the first EMS's government, once recalled in an interview:

> On the first day of governance itself, E.M.S. very obviously made it clear the aims of his Government. It was not to create a communist revolution in Kerala; it was impossible and impractical. On the other hand, as the Party was with the national leaders of India during the struggle for Independence, its aim was to create a democratic Government in which the people have the ultimate sovereignty. It also aimed at distributing the agrarian land to the farmers, establishing industrial institutions, which would ensure labour to labourers, provide equality among the people and thus wielding human rights completely as a weapon to alienate capitalist forces....

In the opportunity the people gave him to head a Communist government, Comrade EMS saw a mandate to translate his party's ideals into practice. The land reforms initiated by him, which fixed an absolute ceiling on the land a family could own and which also provided for the excess land to be redistributed among the landless, remain the most successfully implemented land reforms in our country so far. The only other State that has come closer to the Kerala experiment is that of West Bengal. Fixity of tenure, freedom from eviction and a fair rent were some of the most notable features in the

land reforms introduced by him. He even got the land rights of the hutment dwellers defined.

Closely associated with the cause of the peasantry and the peasant movement in Kerala, the contribution of Comrade EMS to improve the agrarian system in the State is legendary. Possessing excellent communication skill, he actively campaigned to make peasants and other ordinary workers politically conscious about social inequalities and mobilized them to fight for their rights. Who can forget his lone minute of dissent to the Report of the Malabar Tenancy Enquiry Committee in 1939 in favour of the peasants when the rest of the Committee members had reached a consensus in favour of the landlords? One could see in it the seeds of one of the most comprehensive land reforms in India. Apart from the well-known agrarian reforms, his government was credited with having brought in a number of other reforms, particularly in the education system by widening its access to the common people, in Kerala.

Incidentally, Comrade Namboodiripad also headed the first ever coalition government in India. In fact, as the Chief Minister of Kerala, he laid down the parameters for successful coalition governance in the State and in the country. It goes to his credit that he did not allow political expediency to compromise with his principles to align with any of the political parties known to have communal identities. Namboodiripad had identified communalism as the greatest threat to democracy and consistently fought the divisive and communal forces and sectarianism all through his life. Under his leadership the Communist Party gave concrete guidance to promote harmonious relationship among different sections of society. His commitment to the cause of the common man was indeed absolute.

Known for his austere and simple life style, he was a role model for all Communists. He provided effective leadership to his party as its General Secretary for nearly a decade. Even when he ceased to be its General Secretary, his was one of the most powerful influences on the party and its programmes. An ardent believer in party discipline, he had great faith in democratic values. He firmly believed in the necessity of democratic decentralization and his efforts resulted in Kerala having one of the most efficient systems of *Panchayati Raj* in the country today. He was a political leader who raised politics through his steadfast commitment to the cause of the people's welfare and personal integrity to a loftier level that few can aspire to reach. He brought to politics a new sense of commitment and his belief in democracy and people remained supreme.

He was endowed with a remarkable sense of history, an incisive world view and a profound sense of humour. He made seminal contributions through his writings on land reforms, society, politics, literature and history.

He made his mark as the first Marxist historian in this highly literate State. His dedication to scholarship was legendary; he always found time to write proficiently and prolifically on issues of national relevance, even while remaining in the thick of political life. I understand that just two hours prior to his death, he was busy dictating articles for *Deshabhimani*. No tribute can do justice to the multifaceted, yet austere life led by EMS who was a steadfast anti-imperialist, an unwavering social reformer, an acknowledged literary critic, a renowned Marxist thinker, theoretician and historian and, above all, a person loved and held in very high esteem by millions of people. No wonder he was referred to reverentially as the 'intellectual giant' by all. Today, as we are celebrating his birth centenary, it is equally important to recall his abiding commitment to the ideals of parliamentary democracy. He strove ceaselessly to inculcate in his fellow comrades and countrymen the imperative of empowering people through the instrumentalities of democracy. It is in this context that today I have chosen to speak on 'Democratic Consolidation: The Indian Experience', in reverence to the memory of respected Comrade EMS who dedicated his entire life to serve the people and to promote democratic traditions in the country.

Friends, with the attainment of freedom on 15 August 1947, we opted for a parliamentary democratic form of governance as our Founding Fathers felt that it suited our genius, political ethos, heritage and the specificities of the peculiar Indian situation at that time. In keeping with our traditions, practices and the spirit underlying our freedom struggle, we adopted a Constitution which lays down that the people shall be the ultimate repository of power and authority. The democracy we adopted within the framework of the provisions of our Constitution is committed to the task of creating a social order based on equity and political and economic justice.

One of our most remarkable achievements of the first six decades of freedom is that we have not only sustained but also reinforced a vibrant system of governance based on parliamentary democracy, committed to secularism and inclusive and equitable development. Democracy has come of age and is flourishing and thriving in our country. Since Independence, our people have shown tremendous zeal and enthusiasm for participation in the electoral and governance processes, and thereby have greatly helped in the establishment and strengthening of the largest working democracy in the world. The fourteen general elections that we went through and numerous elections to the State Assemblies, marked by peaceful changes in government, reinforced unquestionably our people's commitment and capability to successfully run a democratic system.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that we have been able to surmount varied problems that confronted our democracy from time to time and have

emerged as one of the most successful experiments with democracy by the post-colonial societies. Our achievements look particularly impressive given the failure of many countries that secured freedom around the same period as we did, to secure even the most elementary constituents of a democratic system. The healthy survival of democracy in India also meant an endorsement of the very viability of democracy for new-born countries and as such it gave a boost to the spread of democratic idea elsewhere in the world. In the early years of Independence, there was widespread skepticism about the ability of democratic institutions to survive in our poverty-stricken, inequality-ridden and graded society. Proving sceptics wrong, our democratic institutions have emerged robust, surviving numerous challenges and enjoying wider legitimacy among most sections of our population.

For a country of continental size and widespread diversity like India, nation building has indeed been a gigantic task. Through our parliamentary polity reinforced by a multi-party system and provisions for free and fair elections to representative bodies, accountability of the Executive, independence of the Judiciary, existence of a free and vigilant Fourth Estate and an ever watchful citizenry, we have provided effective institutional framework for a successful democracy. According to Professor Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate, 'What India has achieved under democratic framework in the past over five decades is far more impressive and it overwhelms some of the shortcomings and failures'.

Today we are a self-reliant economy and a self-sufficient granary which, on its own, is feeding the world's second largest population. Besides having a formidable industrial and military base, we have built up one of the world's largest pools of scientific and technological manpower. With democratic planning and the sustained efforts of our democratically elected governments, we have been witnessing increasing growth rate for the past few years and today we are acknowledged as a significant player in the global economy, which augurs well for the future and health of our democracy. We achieved all this despite the fact that in the past half-a-century, we faced many critical situations, numerous challenges from within and without trying to divide the country on the basis of religion and caste, insurgencies, waves of terrorism, proxy wars and external aggressions. Our biggest achievement has been that the common man remained unshaken all through this period in his faith in the democratic system.

On the social front too, we have made significant gains. Our Constitution, when it came into force, also set the tone for a progressive and egalitarian society, thus offering hope to the millions who had been suffering for centuries remaining on the fringes of a hierarchical and stratified social order. Removal of untouchability and treating everybody as equal before the law were nothing

less than silent, yet profound revolutions. The provisions of affirmative action and positive discriminations to empower the deprived and the weaker sections have changed the lives of millions of people who are today leading much better and more dignified lives than their ancestors could ever hope for. Many of the governmental interventions are focused on the emancipation of the disadvantaged sections of our society in order to empower them socially, economically, politically and even emotionally. In fact, Comrade EMS led the way as the Chief Minister of Kerala in many of these areas. Our legislative bodies at the Centre and in the States have passed several legislations for safeguarding the vulnerable sections against social discrimination, violence and atrocities and for promoting the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections. Nonetheless, we all agree that mere enactment of laws does not guarantee the eradication of the related problems. Proper implementation of the legislations is necessary to ensure that the intended beneficiaries get the optimum benefits. Further, to tackle the problems in a holistic manner, it is imperative to think and go beyond the legislative initiatives.

Our Constitution did not only provide a political scheme of governance for the country, but it also provided a blue-print for social and economic transformation of the people. The Founding Fathers took extraordinary care while formulating the Constitution and provided a system of checks and balances among the three main institutions of democracy, *i.e.*, the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. This is one of the characteristic features of our democratic set-up. It has provided for a system that makes a judicious blend of the principle of distribution of powers and the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty in such manner that we have the best of both, but without the absolute rigidity of either of the two. These provisions of the Constitution make it the Supreme Law of the Land, subjecting all the branches of governance to its overriding authority and control.

By taking important initiatives for democratic decentralization, we have largely succeeded in bringing government closer to the people, thereby making it easier for the ordinary citizens to participate and exert influence in the decision-making process. When power is brought closer to the citizens, the political process becomes more tangible and transparent involving more people in the democratic processes. The passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to our Constitution, which gave a new life to *Panchayati Raj* system, were landmark initiatives in this direction. Bringing democracy closer to women, *dalits* and other marginalised classes, this experiment has proved to be extremely successful. Notably, the reservation of seats for women in the *Panchayat* elections as per the constitutional provisions has contributed immensely to the political empowerment of a large number of women who had earlier been outside the realm of political participation.

A large number of progressive legislations have been enacted by our Parliament to nurture human dignity and fundamental rights of the citizens, for providing them access to information thus far denied to them and for ensuring employment and thereby to address rural poverty, among other things. A number of special agencies and commissions have also been set up with parliamentary initiatives to look into specific problems and issues related to human rights, women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, minorities, backward classes and other disadvantaged sections of our society like the workers in the unorganised sectors, so that the benefits of a progressive and inclusive democracy accrue to all.

In the last six decades, we have indeed come a long way in the task of nation-building, in preserving the country's unity and integrity and in consolidating and strengthening our democratic institutions; but we still have miles to go before we are able to realize the dreams of our Founding Fathers for the social, economic and political emancipation of every citizen of our country. As we know, the achievement of economic democracy along with political democracy had been the cardinal concern of the country's leadership at the time of Independence, as they firmly believed that unless prosperity reached every nook and corner of our country, we cannot uphold the fundamentals of democracy in the long run.

But, unfortunately, we have not been successful in ensuring that the fruits of development reached the lower-most strata of society. Poverty, illiteracy, high rates of infant and maternal mortality, adverse gender ratio, unemployment, poor health-care system, caste, gender and religion-based prejudices and incidences of farmers' suicides are issues that have remained as blots on our democracy. It is still a matter of great distress that we have not been able to ensure a decent living condition for our large working class. Our peasantry continues to fight the vagaries of nature, rigours of the feudal social system and global forces and is eking out a miserable existence, finding itself at the periphery of all the development that is just bypassing them.

Democratic practices could be undermined by inequalities, even when democratic institutions are well in place. A fair distribution of power and resources is the basic and fundamental requirement of democracy and as such inequality of any kind is a hindrance to its growth and consolidation. We cannot enjoy the full potential of being an IT superpower when millions of our people remain illiterate. Similarly, we cannot become a global economic power if millions of our rural homes are denied the basic facilities for a dignified human existence.

It is a strange paradox that while in the last decade, our economy grew at an average annual rate of about 7 per cent, about 40 per cent of the world's poor still live in India and at the same time the number of billionaires is

growing. In spite of the completion of ten Five Year Plans and implementation of numerous developmental schemes, nearly one third of our population is living below the poverty line. More than a fifth of our population still do not have any access to quality health-care. With about a third of our population being illiterate, we are home to the largest number of illiterates in the world. Only about 10 per cent of our University-eligible youth have the real opportunity for that. A country with such an unequal distribution of opportunities and wealth can hardly promise long-term security and stability. According to Prof. Amartya Sen, 'The biggest failure in India is social inequality; it takes its toll both directly – in terms of quality of life – and indirectly – in terms of reducing the economic opportunities that the people have'.

Democracy indeed needs social stability to succeed in its goals. The greatest threat to social stability emanates from poverty, illiteracy and ignorance of rights. Democratic consolidation is not possible unless a decisive battle against all social evils and economic backwardness is fought at every level. There has to be a paradigm shift in this context; we must change the course of our development in such a way that the benefits of the country's progress reach right down to the most disadvantaged sections of society.

For democracy to be self-sustaining it has to be inclusive in every sense of the term. Gender disparity in terms of income distribution, access to resources and participation in the decision-making processes is, therefore, highly detrimental to democratic development. In India, half of our population consists of women and due to various societal and historical reasons, there is a glaring gender bias against women in all spheres of life. Our developmental efforts cannot be successful if we fail to make women equal partners in our nation-building endeavours. Our experience at various political and administrative levels has shown that women tend to do better in terms of participation in the decision-making process when they are trusted and empowered. As I said earlier, a major step in this direction was taken with the passage of the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments providing for reservation for women in local level democratic institutions.

I feel, women's participation and empowerment at all levels of society is undoubtedly the key to propelling democracy forward. I hope the revived interest in the proposed legislative initiative will be pursued to its logical conclusion and an effective legal remedy will be in place soon to ensure the due representation of women in our higher representative bodies. A large section of our population are looking forward to it with great interest today and my hope is that it will be a part of our Constitution during my tenure as the Speaker of Lok Sabha.

Certainly, there are perils and pitfalls of democracy which do not relate much to the democratic institutions *per se* but to the democratic practices. Today, there is a growing feeling in the country that our democratic practices are often being deeply compromised. The most vital process of elections themselves have been one such area. Though we have an impressive electoral system which has proved its credibility and resilience on several occasions; in most cases ensuring free and fair process, there are times when its fairness has been compromised in various ways.

The degeneration in the essentials of our electoral system caused by the negation of socio-political values poses a serious threat to our democracy. In this context, we need to address issues like corrupt electoral practices, criminalization of politics, the vicious role played by money and muscle power in deciding election results, inadequate representation of women and, more significantly, lack of voter participation and voter awareness. Though we had made several attempts to reform the electoral system from time to time, the desired result is not yet achieved. We need to remain vigilant to the growing need of revamping the country's electoral system and strive to address the issues in their entirety.

Yet another serious problem before us concerns the justice delivery system that we have in place in our country. An efficient and effective judicial system is one of the primary requirements for democracy to succeed. The legal system in India has sound institutional foundations incorporating all basic democratic principles of impartiality, secularism and equality before law. But, as we can see, in practice, the functioning of our justice delivery system is at variance with certain democratic ideals because of some organs of our Constitution are trying to encroach into others domain, and thereby creating distortions. The backlog of millions of pending cases has virtually paralyzed our legal system. Legal proceedings generally take years to be completed apart from entailing large and mostly unaffordable expenses and are often far from intelligible for the average citizen. As a result, legal protection tends to remain beyond the effective reach of the people, mostly the poor. Those at the receiving end of the system end up with justice eluded because of inordinate delays and huge expenses, beyond the reach of the poor peasants, the dismissed workmen and the downtrodden.

The corrupt practices in our judicial system are frequently reported in the media. This, together with the high cost of litigation, has made the common man apprehensive about approaching the courts for redressal of any grievance. Not only have the courts become inaccessible and unaffordable for large sections of our population, the inordinately slow justice delivery system has shaken the faith of our citizens in our judicial system itself.

If democracy in India is to take deep roots, the key elements of good governance have to be practised by all. Unfortunately, our administrative apparatus is afflicted with a number of evils eating into the very foundation of our governance system. We need to ensure good public administration by effecting appropriate institutional reforms, that can give people the scope they need to develop their skills and thus actively articulate their concerns and rights. Equitable distribution of the society's resources, curbing the abuse of power and corruption, and guaranteeing equality of all persons before the law through effective governance are fundamental to a well-functioning democracy.

Yet another area that warrants our focused attention is in addressing the rampant corruption that has afflicted our system. In fact, corruption is endemic at all levels and spheres of public life in India and it has become deeply embedded in our society. It is an accepted fact that corruption erodes the Rule of Law, hampers economic growth, distorts societal and human values and weakens the very edifice of democracy. In more recent times, corruption in high public offices has raised serious moral and political concerns. I believe that we must have sound institutional mechanisms in place to contain corruption, to strengthen accountability and to promote good governance. It will inevitably improve the quality of our democracy, and the effectiveness of its delivery mechanisms.

Failure to set and follow high ethical standards by political leadership, no doubt, would lead to erosion of public trust, diminishing community expectations and exacerbation of social divisions. Leaders in both the government and the civil society have a duty and responsibility to always lead by example. Values are conveyed and supported not by words but by deeds.

In the past six decades, the political realities have undergone drastic changes. From the one-party dominant system, we have matured to successful running of coalition governments both at the Centre and in several of our States. It is, perhaps, a little known fact that as early as in late 1980s, Com. EMS had predicted the onset of a long era of coalition politics in the country at the national level. Today we are experiencing that reality. Under the changed scenario, it is essential that the political parties remain responsible for ensuring smooth functioning of the legislative institutions without which our system of parliamentary democracy will lose the faith and respect of the people and the resultant cynicism and tension will weaken the entire constitutional edifice.

Politics in our country today is, unfortunately, increasingly becoming confrontational and adversarial. This is not in the interest of the health of democracy. All political parties, whether in Government or in the Opposition,

must view themselves as partners in development if they are serious about promoting and consolidating democracy in the real sense. It is time for us to move from confrontational politics to cooperative politics in the interest of our people and for strengthening our democracy.

We have always been proud of the fact that India is the perfect example of unity in diversity. But of-late, we find vested interests trying to twist this diversity to convert it into tools for political confrontation. Religion, caste and language have been used earlier also to garner support for political parties and we have seen how dangerous the consequences could be. Learning lessons from our own history, we must desist from rousing passions in the name of religion and caste in the interest of the unity and integrity of our country and for maintaining harmonious relations among all sections of society. In fact, democracy and secularism are inextricably intertwined. If we abandon one, the other will also go. The single-most defining element of Indian democracy is the acceptance and tolerance of all religions and granting explicit freedom to all its citizens to practise their faiths without violating the others' right to do so. Religion cannot be allowed to be mixed with politics as a shortcut to rouse popular passion, otherwise, the evil of communalism will again become a powerful force in our polity which will ultimately undermine our democratic fabric and militate against the basic principles governing our national life. In this context, it needs reiteration that secularism should not remain a mere ideal. It should be an article of faith for every single citizen of the country, for without secularism, we cannot facilitate a truly inclusive democracy and a united country.

Democracy requires profound commitment at every level and from every citizen and every organ of our democratic system. Democratic institutions are like tender saplings which, if not nurtured with diligence and care, can wither away. Our Parliament is the fountainhead of the people's will and aspirations. Parliament, being the supreme representative body of our country, has to function effectively without losing the trust of the people.

Regrettably, over the years, there has been a decline in the quality and standards of behaviour of our elected representatives. The image associated with many elected representatives among the people is very negative which, in turn, cause to breed cynicism among the people about the efficacy of our political system itself. A large section of the people are beginning to feel that neither the political parties nor their representatives, specifically elected to serve them, are faithfully performing their expected roles. We urgently need to raise the esteem of our parliamentary institutions in the people's eyes by finding solutions to address all issues having a bearing on the quality of the work and behaviour of those elected to the representative bodies. As a member of Parliament for nearly four decades and as the Presiding Officer of the

popular House of our Parliament, I have been witnessing the functioning of our parliamentary institutions very closely. On several occasions, I have been emphasizing the need for introducing the system of 'Recall' to deal with those members of the legislative bodies in our country, who function in a manner unbecoming of an elected representative of the people.

Friends, it is in this context that the role of the media which is considered the fourth pillar of democracy assumes special significance. Freedom of the Press is an integral part of the functioning of a representative democracy. Free media working with positive criticism can help ensure that the Government remains responsive to the urges and concerns of the people. Apart from this, the media serves a 'watch-dog' function by ensuring that the elected representatives carry out the wishes of those who elected them. Media have also a very constructive role to play by informing the people about their rights, by helping them to form opinion on the issues facing the country and by rousing them to play a more proactive role in the country's politics. Unfortunately, of-late, it appears that, propelled by narrow commercial interest, our mainstream media has surrendered that larger social role and have fallen for short-term gains, where market forces have a greater say in formulating their editorial policies.

The media is often seen taking partisan approaches, circulating half-truths in the garb of news and thus causing to reinforce prejudices and cynicism among the people. We can also discern a tendency among sections of the media of letting itself to be used as proxies in the battle between rival political groups, in the process sowing divisiveness rather than consensus, and suspicion rather than social trust. If such tendencies are not curbed, the media can become antithetical to democracy, contributing to the undermining of trust among our people towards our democratic institutions.

Since democracy requires an active participation of citizens, it is the responsibility of the media to keep citizens engaged in the business of governance by informing, educating and mobilizing the public. I would urge the media to keep their priorities right and play a very responsible role as opinion builders. They are, in fact, our partners in the preservation and consolidation of democracy and thus need to focus on issues that help in maintaining the unity of the country and in creating a new breed of informed and enlightened citizenry. It should be borne in mind that only a vibrant democracy can ensure the freedom of the Press.

Friends, democratic consolidation is not a one-time process. It is only through the committed efforts of all sections of polity and every institution associated with democracy that this process can be sustained meaningfully. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to identify and curb all the negative tendencies that are causing erosion in our democratic values. In an attempt

to occupy more space in the polity, no institution should do anything to discredit or to marginalize any other institution, particularly our core people's institutions. But, above all, it is the peoples' representatives and political parties and leaderships who have the greatest responsibility to shoulder.

Comrade EMS was a political leader of unimpeachable integrity. He dedicated his entire life to the furtherance of democratic values and to improve the conditions of the common masses. Rarely does one come across leaders with such foresight, vision and passionate commitment to public causes. On his birth centenary, let us pledge to keep alive his lofty ideals and to make renewed efforts, in consonance with the values enshrined in our Constitution, to further consolidate our democracy so as to ensure a dignified existence for the people of our country.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the Institute of Parliamentary Affairs of the Government of Kerala for organizing this Lecture in memory of Comrade EMS and for according me this great honour to share with this august gathering some of my views on the process of democratic consolidation in the context of our own country. I wish you all success in your endeavours towards the promotion of the philosophy and ideals of Comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad, a great Leader in all senses of the term.

Thank you.

COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGE FOR PARLIAMENT: MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC*

It is indeed a matter of great honour for me to open the discussion on the subject *'The Communications Challenge for Parliament: Meeting the Information Needs of Members and the Public'*. One of the most remarkable developments of the last quarter of the Twentieth Century was the emergence of democracy as the most preferred system of governance across the world. Another equally remarkable development of this era was the revolutionary growth in the field of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). The immediate result of these advancements is the information explosion and the resultant evolution of an information-driven world order.

In today's world, information is perceived as the greatest source of power. This is all the more so for those involved in managing public affairs, especially people's representatives. To deliberate and discuss meaningfully and to take informed decisions, parliamentarians must have unrestrained access to authentic, objective and non-partisan information. An informed parliamentarian can be of immense help in the emergence of an informed democracy. Similarly, an informed electorate can strengthen the edifice of democracy. The right to know and the right to information, along with the accessibility to the latest information, thus become crucial factors in a successful democratic system.

Like in other Commonwealth Parliaments, the Indian Parliament and our State Legislatures too have developed various procedural devices for eliciting information, raising matters of public concern in the House and for enforcing Executive accountability. Among other procedural devices, Questions, Half-an-Hour Discussions, Short Notice Questions, Calling Attention Notices, etc. offer ample opportunities to the members to seek information on matters of urgent public importance.

Our Parliament has taken several initiatives in the last four years to equip parliamentarians with objective and authentic information on diverse issues. We have constituted Parliamentary Forums on important subjects which

* At the Plenary Session of the 54th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (9 August 2008).

enable members to gain information and knowledge on issues and developments in the areas concerned, make them aware of their manifold dimensions and help them adopt a result-oriented approach towards them. We have started a Lecture Series by subject specialists and experts which provide additional inputs to members on various contemporary problems and help them in playing a proactive role in addressing them meaningfully.

In the wake of the ICT revolution, to access accurate, exhaustive and objective information within the shortest possible time, parliamentarians need to rely on the latest available technologies in this area. These technologies have made their impact on Parliaments too in the context of information management. Almost all activities of our Parliament have been automated and all members are provided with the latest computer facilities. Our Parliament has its own website which is electronically accessible to the public. Our Parliament Library too is substantially automated and we have gone far in making use of ICTs in information management. Needless to say, the growing use of computers, generation of electronic database and introduction of networking technologies have facilitated easy availability of information to our members as well as citizens.

We acknowledge that while it is important that we ensure Executive accountability to Parliament, it is equally imperative that the institution of Parliament itself is accountable to the people. Just as parliamentarians need information to be effective elected representatives, the general public should have access to information to better serve the cause of democracy. With a view to making governance more transparent and accountable to the general public, our Parliament enacted the Right to Information Act in 2005. In pursuance of this Act, rules have been framed in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Secretariats providing for the procedure for obtaining/supplying information and a Central Public Information Officer has been designated in both the Secretariats.

With a view to communicating Parliament to our citizens, we have taken several steps to telecast/broadcast the proceedings of Parliament, thus bringing the institution nearer to the people. On 14 December 2004, two separate dedicated satellite channels were launched for telecasting live the entire proceedings of the Houses of Parliament nationwide. Going a step further, we launched our own independent Lok Sabha TV Channel, totally owned and independently managed by the House itself, in July 2006. The proceedings of the Houses are also webcast on the Homepage of our Parliament. Acknowledging the importance of the media in disseminating information about the functioning of our Parliament to the public, we have provided special facilities to the media persons for coverage of parliamentary proceedings, events and activities. Another important initiative of ours has

been the setting up of the Parliament Museum. The Museum, open to the general public, is a hi-tech 'story telling museum', depicting the continuum of India's democratic ethos and institutional development.

We have also taken several other steps to promote the link between Parliament as an institution and the public. These include: regular interaction with media persons, including Orientation Programmes, Seminars and Workshops for them; holding exhibitions on parliamentary democracy in different States for the general public; liberal access to the rich collections of the Parliament Library for journalists, research scholars and students; and setting up of a Children's Corner to cater to the specific information and knowledge needs of children. Another significant development has been the introduction of the Lok Sabha Internship Programme in the year 2008 which provides an opportunity to young scholars to acquaint them with the working of parliamentary democracy and democratic institutions in general and especially the Indian parliamentary system.

Distinguished Delegates, as you all know, the revolutionary breakthroughs in the field of information and communication technologies have impacted our lives in many ways, touching upon virtually all aspects of human activity. Many nations have adopted the ICTs to interact within the Government machinery and with the citizens and e-governance has emerged as one of the critical components in facilitating good governance. That being so, in a digital democracy, it is imperative that there should be no digital divide between the developed and the developing world. In this context, you would recall that the Heads of Government at the Malta CHOGM in November 2005 had adopted the Malta Declaration on Networking the Commonwealth for Development and endorsed the establishment of a special Fund to achieve the performance targets envisaged in the Action Programme. India took a lead role in the endorsement of the Programme with a view to sharing our expertise in ICTs with the Commonwealth community. India also made a contribution of Euro one million to the Fund and announced, in principle, to provide up to five experts for periods up to six months for assisting other Commonwealth countries in developing ICT capacity. In this regard, I would like to share with this august gathering that our Government accords high priority to improving the quality of basic governance and has launched a National e-Governance Plan comprising 27 Mission Mode Projects and eight support components to be implemented at the Central, State and Local Government levels, at an estimated cost of Rs. 23,000 crore, corresponding to about US $ 5476 million over the next five years.

The traditional media has an important role to play and has a special responsibility in helping to sustain the people's confidence, in the democratic system not by overlooking the aberrations, but by presenting facts before the people with a sense of objectivity and courage.

The observation of Peter R. Kann, a Pulitzer prize winning journalist, that 'the press is at least partially responsible for greater public scepticism toward traditional institutions ... .', is not without basis. As he stated: '... it's one thing—and an appropriate one—for the press to probe particular instances of political corruption. It's quite another thing to jump to the cynical conclusion that the political process, and all politicians, are corrupted—that 'they all do it.' Today, when democratic institutions in many societies are being faced with a credibility deficit, the media need to ask itself, if it is contributing towards enhancing that credibility or is it also, unwittingly, driven by short-term commercial gains and sensationalism, becoming a factor in undermining it.

Today, the onset of the electronic and on-line media has made its reach truly global and indeed instant, thereby eliminating geographical barriers. The new technologies offer an important means to the parliamentarians for interacting with the citizens in a more productive and purposive way. However, this alone is not sufficient to rebuild public trust. As elected representatives, it is our bounden duty to make efforts to enhance the credibility of the democratic processes before the citizens and effectively communicate and interface with the public so as to strengthen and sustain their trust in parliamentary democracy.

Distinguished Delegates, I am confident that the discussion in this Plenary Session will enable us to address the issues and challenges faced by our Legislatures in meeting the information needs of both the members and the public in a more effective and efficacious manner.

Thank you.

ROLE OF PRESIDING OFFICERS IN STRENGTHENING PUBLIC FAITH IN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS*

It is an honour and a matter of great pleasure for me to be with you here at the 73rd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India. Chandigarh had been the venue of two of our previous Conferences, the first in 1963 hosted by the Legislature of undivided Punjab and the second in 2001 hosted by the Punjab Vidhan Sabha. I convey my gratitude to the Hon'ble Speaker of the Haryana Vidhan Sabha for organising this year's Conference in this beautiful city and for making impeccable arrangements.

I welcome 18 distinguished Presiding Officers who have joined our fraternity since our last Conference. I also place on record our deep appreciation of the valuable contributions made to our Conferences by the former Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies who have left office since our previous Conference.

One of the subjects that we discussed at the last Conference related to indiscipline and misconduct of members of Legislatures. It is a matter of great concern that the malaise still remains acute. All of us are facing unruly conduct of members inside the House, disrupting the proceedings and forcing adjournments of the House. With great sadness, I had to refer the names of 32 members of the Lok Sabha to the House Committee of Privileges in April this year for examination, investigation and report on their disorderly conduct in the House. Subsequently, I withdrew my decision following the assurance given to me by the leaders of parliamentary parties to provide full cooperation in ensuring a smooth running of the House. Unfortunately, despite such assurances, disruptions of House proceedings and forced adjournments due to most unruly conduct of a section of members have continued.

It is important that the legislators should be role models both inside and outside the House. On 18 May 2007, I referred a complaint of misconduct against a member of Lok Sabha to a House Committee for examination and report. The Committee, in its report, found the member guilty of misusing his privileges and facilities and recommended that the member be reprimanded and also suspended from the membership of the House for

* At the Inauguration of the 73rd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, Chandigarh (21 September 2008).

thirty sittings of the House, and also be restrained from taking his spouse or companion on official tours for the remaining period of the term of the House. The Report was adopted by the House.

While upholding parliamentary privileges, members of Parliament and State Legislatures have to always remember that these privileges exist to enable them to discharge their responsibilities without any fear or hindrance. The Committee of Privileges of Lok Sabha considered the relevant aspects of Parliamentry privileges and in its report, recommended against codification of parliamentary privileges.

We should also see that the incident of 22 July 2008 during the debate on the Motion of Confidence moved by the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh in Lok Sabha is never repeated anywhere. Following the incident, I constituted a seven-member Committee on 26 July 2008 to inquire into the complaints made by the three members who are alleged to have been approached with the offer of money for their votes. The Report of the Committee is awaited and all necessary action, as will be called for, will be taken after its submission.

At the last Conference, I had informed you about the constitution of several Parliamentary Fora in our Parliament and the institution of a Lecture Series for the benefit of members. I had then mentioned about four such fora—one each on Water Conservation and Management, Youth, Children, and Population and Public Health. Since then, we have constituted another Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change. These fora help members to interact with subject experts so as to gain a deeper understanding of issues and subjects and to discuss them inside the House and its Committees.

The Lecture Series that has been started for members has been found to be very informative and useful in terms of providing a deep insight into issues of contemporary relevance. Twenty-two Lectures organized so far have been well received. We have also started an Annual Parliamentary Lecture, instituted in memory of Prof. Hiren Mukerjee, and the first Lecture was delivered by Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen on 'Demands of Social Justice', on 11 August 2008.

The Lok Sabha also organized a Round Table Discussion on 4th September 2008 on "Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy", at which eminent parliamentarians, legal luminaries, renowned academics, veteran media persons and civil society leaders expressed deep concern over the present unfortunate and disquieting state of our democracy, especially our parliamentary institutions, and called for urgent remedial measures to redress the situation. This is the first in a series of Round Table Discussions which I have initiated. It is my earnest hope that all stakeholders of democracy will take note of the consensus that emerges from such free and frank discussions among the leading personalities in various fields.

In this Conference, we will be discussing three important subjects, namely, "Time Management in the House and Code of Conduct for members", "The Need to Strengthen Public Faith in Democratic Institutions" and "Terrorism— A Threat to National Unity: Role of Legislatures".

Legislative pre-eminence is the basic postulate of parliamentary democracy as the elected representatives are expected to articulate the people's problems, demands and aspirations. We are proud of being the largest democracy in the world, and we have made significant progress through the working of the parliamentary system of governance. However, there is now a growing sense of disillusionment and despair among a large section of our people because of the manner of functioning of the elected representatives and the representative bodies. The crisis of public faith is not so much with respect to the democratic institutions, as it is with the manner of their functioning for which the people who work such institutions have the primary responsibility. The Legislature has come in for greater share of public criticism because of the conduct of members inside the Chambers of our Legislatures leading to frequent disruptions and the resultant inability of the House to transact business, wastage of time and public money.

Various factors are responsible for the problem in time management in our Legislatures. With the expansion of governmental activity over the years, the tasks of the Legislatures have become more complex, voluminous and diversified. As such, the programmes, policies and performance of all the Ministries and Departments do not always come up for close scrutiny of the House due to lack of time. Moreover, the problem has been compounded by the multiplicity of political parties and the need to allocate time to each of them. However, the most important factor contributing to time constraint lies in the conduct of members. Unruly conduct and interruptions leading to forced adjournments have been a serious problem in our Legislatures.

The Committee of Presiding Officers on "Procedural Uniformity and Better Management of Time of the House", constituted in pursuance of the decision taken at the 62nd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India in 1998, examined the problem of time management and felt that a consensus ought to be arrived at regarding the minimum number of sittings of the Legislatures, and if needed, the Constitution should be amended. It also recommended that it should be made mandatory on the part of the Government that the duration of the Sessions of the House should be fixed in consultation with the Presiding Officer concerned and that more time should be made available for non-governmental business which may be possible, only if the duration of the Sessions is appropriately increased. While recognizing the importance of the so-called 'Zero Hour', it recommended that not more than 30 minutes per day be allotted to 'Zero Hour', which has

to be regulated strictly. I believe the time has come when we must seriously consider the desirability of having the 'Zero Hour', because it has turned out to be the most unruly period of the House proceedings.

However, we should recognize that unless all stakeholders in the democratic system discharge their duties effectively, procedural rules and conventions will be of no effect. In this regard, members of our Legislatures, and political parties have the most vital role to play. If a large party or a group of parties with substantial number of members are bent on disrupting the proceedings of the House in concert, the Presiding Officer can do little to run the House or to regulate its proceedings.

Today's political atmosphere, characterized by intolerance, divisiveness, confrontation and disrespect for dissent, is increasingly corroding our socio-political system. Confrontational politics, based on political polarization around primordial loyalties of caste, religion, region and language, has only accentuated existing societal fault lines. In many parts of the country, political power has become an instrument to promote a partisan and sectarian agenda, which is coming in the way of achieving an inclusive democracy. Our democratic institutions are, in large measure, reflective of the divisiveness in our socio-political life, thereby weakening their capacity in addressing meaningfully the problems the people are faced with. The aberrations now visible in the nation's democratic institutions are becoming more conspicuous in their nature, impinging on the principles of democratic accountability, transparency and probity in public life, which are threatening to become the norm rather than exceptions, as was the case in the past.

As a result, and expectedly so, there is a growing sense of disillusionment among large sections of our people about the efficacy of our democratic governance structures and institutions to address the legitimate concerns and problems of different sections of society. When the democratic institutions continuously fail to tackle the genuine concerns and aspirations of the people, their faith in the utility of such institutions will be undermined as the institutions themselves will have lost the rationale behind their very existence which is to advance the public good and the welfare of the teeming masses. Our Legislatures are worst affected by the crisis of public faith and thus has a major share of responsibility to redress the situation. We have to deeply introspect and analyze what has gone wrong with the functioning of our institutions and what factors are responsible for the erosion of public faith in them.

The use of muscle and money power in our electoral process and criminalization of politics has vitiated the political environment in the country and also the smooth functioning of our Legislatures. Competitive and confrontational politics has seriously compromised the ability of the House

to conduct its business in an orderly manner. Such disruptions and forced adjournments of House proceedings not only cause the wastage of precious time of the House resulting in wastage of huge sums of taxpayers' money, important legislations, and even the Budget, are passed without debate due to disruptions. Forced adjournments make the House to suspend the Question Hour, thereby denying opportunities to members who want to raise issues of public importance on the floor of the House. All this amounts to abdicating the responsibility of ensuring the accountability of the Executive to the Legislature, which is the foundational basis of parliamentary governance. Such disruptions have only accentuated the public disillusionment about the working of our democratic institutions.

Dignified conduct of people's representatives is essential not only when they are inside the Chambers of our Legislatures, but also in society at large. An impression has gained ground that people with access to political power, resource and influence can remain out of the reach of the legal processes. We need to urgently address the issue of decline of personal integrity and probity in public life, and to reinforce public faith in our democratic institutions.

Today, justifiably, there is a growing demand to introduce a system of 'recall' to deal with elected representatives who ignore the interests of the people and are guilty of malfeasance and improper conduct or indulge in corrupt or criminal activities. The "right to recall" is based on the principle that elected members of representative bodies should be accountable and answerable to their constituents at all times, both inside and outside the Legislatures. If a member is found to be insensitive, incompetent, corrupt, indifferent to the problems of the people, his duties or indulge in activities or behave in a manner unbecoming of a people's representative, I feel, his constituents should be in a position to demand his recall before the expiry of his term.

To my mind, the time has come when as Presiding Officers, we should not look on helplessly and allow the whole system to steadily degenerate, but take a pro-active stand to tackle the issues head on. In this context, I strongly recommend that we begin with setting our Houses in order, literally. The Lok Sabha made history when it expelled ten of its members in 2005 in the 'cash for query scam'. This exemplary adherence to its commitment to good conduct has continued with the three-month suspension of four members of the Lok Sabha in 2006 for their role in irregularities related to the MPLADS funds. The Inquiry Committee looking into the incident of 22 July during the debate on the Trust Vote is likely to submit its report shortly and appropriate action will be taken on the basis of its findings. It is an undeniable fact that such incidents have caused incalculable damage to the dignity of the Lok Sabha as the highest elected representative body, and have undermined

public confidence in our elected representatives and parliamentary democracy as such. The House has demonstrated its resolve to cleanse itself, and this process of self-cleansing must continue, should there be any such occasion in future.

It has been my constant endeavour to improve the functioning of Parliament and to enhance its image in the eyes of the people. As the Presiding Officer of the House of the People, it has been my sincere effort to prevent scenes of disruptions inside the House by meeting leaders of various political parties and groups so as to enlist their cooperation and help for the smooth conduct of proceedings of the House. While assurances of providing support have been forthcoming, they are unfortunately followed more in their breach than in their observance. As Presiding Officers, we have an onerous responsibility to run the House smoothly, and, therefore, we need to seriously deliberate on what measures to adopt in such situations. I have made it unmistakably clear that I will no longer hesitate to invoke the provisions of the Rules of the House in case of gross indiscipline inside the House.

It has also been my endeavour to bring Parliament closer to the people. The introduction of a full-fledged 24-hour Lok Sabha Television Channel has enabled the people to see live the way their representatives discharge their responsibilities inside the Chamber of the Lok Sabha. Our people are now showing greater interest in watching the proceedings of Parliament. The viewership surveys indicate that the people are watching closely how their representatives behave themselves and how truly our democratic institutions live up to their expectations.

In a democracy, the media play an important role as an interface between the democratic institutions and the people. Unfortunately, competitive journalism and the obsession with market share have taken a big toll on responsible reporting. Though it is undeniable that it has been instrumental in uncovering the misdemeanour of people's representatives enabling Parliament to take strict action against them, the media has been more interested in covering the undignified acts of members inside Parliament and the pandemonium and adjournments such acts lead to rather than the sincere efforts and valuable contributions of many members to structured debates and discussion. I appeal to my friends in the media also to highlight the good work done by sincere and committed members inside the House and its Committees..

The third subject which will be taken up for discussion is 'Terrorism—A Threat to National Unity: Role of Legislatures'. None will disagree that, today, terrorism has emerged as a grave threat not only to peaceful and civilized existence as individuals, but also to national well being. The menace of terrorism has spread its activities widely and has assumed new dimensions

with international involvement and the use of sophisticated weaponry, professional training and networking. The inhuman and barbarous acts of terrorism inflicted on the innocent population of Delhi only last week clearly underscore the gravity of the evil of terrorism.

Terrorists have today vitiated the social and political environment by unleashing a kind of tyranny over the minds of the people. The objective of terrorists is not merely to inflict grave physical damage on lives and properties but also to disrupt civilized existence and orderly social relations by creating hatred and disharmony in society. Terrorists pose a threat to democracy by their very nature, and today their chief targets are open democratic societies. They do not hesitate to exploit the strengths of democracy such as the freedom of movement, open access to public places, and relatively transparent resources of information in the public domain to execute their nefarious designs. No civilized society can tolerate it.

We, as a nation and a democratic polity are committed to taking all democratic and lawful steps to counter the evil of terrorism, including the enactment of effective laws and amending existing laws to fine-tune them to the requirements of the situation and seeking the cooperation of other countries in combating the scourge of terrorism.

Specifically, the role of Legislatures in fighting terrorism is to evaluate the work done by Governments and to ensure that the agencies responsible for the task of fighting terrorism carry out their responsibilities faithfully and within the bounds of the law. Legislatures have also to ensure that the laws enacted by them are not abused and the rights and liberties of the common people are not unduly encroached upon, that may defeat the very purpose of counter-terrorism laws which is basically to ensure public security.

While extraordinary laws are sometimes required to deal with extraordinary situations arising out of terrorist violence, the irony is that such extraordinary laws are prone to abuse leading to the undermining of the rule of law. The first and foremost impact of such laws is felt by law-abiding citizens whose fundamental rights and liberties at times are encroached upon without providing for the timely and proper redressal of their grievances. The power given to the law-enforcement agencies entrusted to tackle such situations are often abused defeating the very purpose of such laws. The observation of the Supreme Court in the People's Union for Civil Liberties *vs.* Union of India case, has assumed a great deal of importance wherein it observed that the "protection and promotion of human rights under the rule of law is essential in the prevention of terrorism' and that if human rights are violated in the process, it will become "self-defeating". It also observed that the "lack of hope for justice provides breeding grounds for terrorism", thus, human rights have to be scrupulously respected in the fight against terrorism.

I believe, we need to adopt a multi-dimensional approach to addressing the menace of terrorism. There is a feeling that we need to strengthen our laws. However, laws and institutional apparatuses lose their potency in the sea of political ambivalence and divisiveness. As Presiding Officers, we cannot but regret the state of affairs, particularly in our Legislatures, which we preside over, and the manner of functioning of our democratic institutions in general. In my view, our deliberations on each of the three subjects have a lot to bear on the others.

Friends, whatever drawbacks and imperfections we may point out in our polity, nobody can dispute the fact that we are the largest working democracy in the world – a fact that gives us a sense of abundant pride. If we sincerely believe that democracy is our most valuable political legacy, then we also need to make suitable changes in our individual and collective behaviour to strengthen our democratic institutions. We can do this only when the undemocratic elements are weeded out from our democratic institutions and an orderly functioning of such institutions is ensured. The Conference of Presiding Officers assumes importance in this regard due to their knowledge and experience with the strengths and weaknesses of the system and the opportunity to share and learn from each other's experiences. I earnestly hope that the deliberations in this Conference will be productive and useful for the Presiding Officers as well as the members of our legislative bodies.

Before I conclude, I heartily thank the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Haryana and his Cabinet colleagues, the Hon'ble Speaker and the Hon'ble Deputy Speaker of the Haryana Vidhan Sabha, the Secretary and the Staff of the Vidhan Sabha Secretariat and all those associated with the organization of this Conference for the excellent arrangements and for their gracious hospitality.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the 73rd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India.

Thank you.

ANTI-DEFECTION LAW: NEED FOR REVIEW*

I am happy to be here with you all at this Symposium which is going to discuss an important subject, namely, 'Anti-Defection Law – Need for Review', being held as part of the Conference of Presiding Officers. Political defections and splits in parties have been a regular feature of Indian politics for several decades. It was after painstaking endeavours spread over almost a period of two decades that the Anti-Defection Law could find place on the statute book with the passage of the Fifty-second Constitution Amendment Act in 1985, which introduced the Tenth Schedule to our Constitution. The Objects and Reasons of the related Amendment Bill clearly stated that 'The evil of political defections has been a matter of national concern. If it is not combated, it is likely to undermine the very foundations of our democracy and the principles which sustain it.' Today, even twenty-three years after coming into force of the Anti-Defection Law, the concern still remains.

Political defection among legislators is indeed a matter of great concern, which affects the stability of the governments and is indeed destructive of the true principles of parliamentary democracy. The Supreme Court in the case of *Kihota Hollohon vs. Zachilhu & others (AIR 1993 SC 412)* has observed that 'these provisions in the Tenth Schedule give recognition to the role of political parties in the political process. A political party goes before the electorate with a particular programme and it sets up candidates at the election on the basis of such programme. A person who gets elected as a candidate set up by a political party is so elected on the basis of the programme of that political party... that political propriety and morality demand that if such a person, after the election, changes his affiliation and leaves the political party which had set him up as a candidate at the election, then he should give up his membership of the legislature and go back before the electorate.'

Friends, the Indian polity has had to contend with the menace of political defections for a long time. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a surge in political defections causing, on several occasions, political instability both at the Centre and in the States. The genesis of the endeavours for bringing forward a legislation in India for curbing the malaise of defections can be traced to a Private member's Resolution moved in the Fourth Lok Sabha by Shri P.Venkatasubbaiah. The adoption of the Resolution eventually led to the

* At the Symposium on 'Anti-Defection Law—Need for Review' during the 73rd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, Chandigarh (23 September 2008).

constitution of the Parliamentary Committee on Defections in the late sixties, followed by attempts to enact the Constitution (Thirty-second Amendment) Bill, 1973 and the Constitution (Forty-eighth Amendment) Bill, 1978. These attempts, laudable as they were, did not yield significant results.

A serious attempt to tackle this problem was made in 1985 with the passage of the Anti-Defection Law as was contained in the Constitution (Fifty-second) Amendment Act. The Act sought to curb individual defections in the Legislatures by providing for disqualification of the defecting member while it allowed splits, if it involved one-third of the strength of the party in the legislature, and mergers of political parties under certain conditions, thereby seeking not to suppress political dissent, an essential pre-requisite for a healthy democracy. However, the fact remains that the operation of the Act, over the years, indicated many grey areas in the law. Breaking away with the support of one-third of the members of the party appeared easy and defections could not be checked, specially so far as smaller parties were concerned.

As a consequence, demands were made from various quarters for strengthening the anti-defection law so as to achieve the desired result. The Constitution was amended in 2003 through the Constitution (Ninety-first) Amendment Act to rectify what seemed to be a lacunae. The amendments omitted the provision relating to splits from the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution and also provided that a member, disqualified under the provisions of the Tenth Schedule, shall also be disqualified for being appointed as a Minister or for holding a remunerative political post for the duration of the period commencing from the date of his disqualification till the expiry of the term of his office or till he is elected again. Thus, the new law provides that the 'split' would no longer be a defence.

The basis of a functional Parliamentary Democracy rests on the party system, where parties have their policies and programmes with different priorities. Since our independence, when India became a Republic and adopted the system of Parliamentary Democracy, we have seen gradually the weakening of the strength of the leading parties resulting in the formation of multiplicity of parties, having conflicting ideologies, programmes and policies. For the last few decades, no single party has been able to earn the people's confidence, resulting in the coming together of parties, whose members are elected in the House with different programmes and ideologies and form coalition Governments. The result has been that both in the Centre and in the State, Governments have been formed on occasions by political parties with disparate programmes and ideologies, who combine only with the object of acquiring power, even by encouraging defections from one party to another and forming unprincipled coalitions which has greatly resulted in vitiating the political morality in the country. Politics based on certain values and well-defined policies and priorities has become a casualty leading to vitiating

the political atmosphere and creating uncertainties in the governance structure. Often allegations of horse trading are made of which we have seen recently a most sordid spectacle. Parties who fight each other bitterly during the election come together immediately after the election, only for the purpose of sharing power and such unprincipled coalitions brought about only to grab power have resulted in the people losing respect for our political system as a whole. The country has witnessed instances when some members elected as Independent candidates are persuaded to support one or other of the big parties with the offer of Cabinet posts to enable the formation of a Government. Unfortunately, the spectacle of *aya rams and gaya rams* still remains the bane of our political system. There have been many instances of post-poll understanding or adjustments between the different political parties, only for the purpose of formation of Government. This has resulted in disparate groups coming together without having any common policies and ideologies.

The situation still continues to remain largely destructive of the principles of parliamentary democracy as defections motivated by power and opportunism continues to be one of the debilitating features of our political system. There has to be a concerted effort to see that political defections are totally banned or at least are not rewarded.

At the Conference of Presiding Officers held in 1998, there were detailed deliberations on the need to review the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution and a Committee of Presiding Officers was constituted under the Chairmanship of Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, Hon'ble Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. The Committee, after in-depth deliberations, identified certain problem areas in the law and recommended measures to bring about amendments in the Tenth Schedule to further strengthen the law. This apart, institutions like the Law Commission of India, Election Commission and the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution have also expressed their concerns and have made suggestions for amendments to the anti-defection law. But not much headway has been made in this direction.

Under the provisions of the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution, the Presiding Officers of the Houses of Legislature have been given the authority to decide questions of violation of the provisions of the Anti-Defection Law. However, over the years the exercise of this power by Presiding Officers has caused controversy and in many cases allegations of political considerations being applied by the Presiding Officers in deciding the matters of defection have been made, which considerably affects the dignity of the high office of the Presiding Officer. It may be that in some occasions unfortunately there have been causes to justify *prima facie* such allegations.

While discharging their functions under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, the Presiding Officers are treated as Tribunals exercising specific

jurisdiction as conferred by the Schedule. Such exercise of power dehors the constitutional authority of the Presiding Officers to have exclusive jurisdiction to regulate the proceedings of the House and as such, the Presiding Officers are not immune from their orders being challenged in Courts of Law and in many cases not only such orders have been set-aside by the judicial authorities but adverse comments have also been made. It has recently appeared in the media that a Presiding Officer of one of the Legislative Assemblies in our country has been directed by the Court to indicate the time within which a pending matter relating to defection will be disposed of by the Presiding Officer, as a grievance has been made before the Court, as appears from the Media, that the concerned Presiding Officer was deliberately delaying the disposal of the matter before him.

The Judiciary has taken up matters where the decisions of the Presiding Officers under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution have been challenged and this jurisdiction has been upheld by the Supreme Court of India.

It is my considered view that it is desirable and indeed necessary, that the jurisdiction and authority to deal with matters of defection as provided in the Tenth Schedule need not continue to be exercised by the Presiding Officers and the power should be conferred on some other authority like a special Tribunal comprised of people well versed in law or on an authority like the Election Commission.

To my mind, the exercise of power and jurisdiction by the Presiding Officer of any House should not be subjected to such scrutiny, which considerably affects the status and the position of the Presiding Officers. With all respect to the Judiciary, whose jurisdiction cannot be denied, it will be fit and proper and indeed, to my mind, desirable that the Presiding Officers do not continue to be under such judicial scrutiny which in many cases has given rise to, in my opinion, avoidable tension between the two constitutional authorities.

I request the Hon'ble Presiding Officers present here to consider the matter with all seriousness, so that suitable recommendation may be made by this Conference to change the provisions of the Constitution whereby the Presiding Officers will be relieved of, what in my opinion, an unwelcome jurisdiction.

I am sure, the deliberations at this Symposium will throw new light on this subject of vital importance, which will enable us to embark upon comprehensive political and legal reforms to tackle the problem of defection, which has weakened our polity.

I wish the deliberations of the Symposium all success.

Thank you.

IMPERATIVE OF ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES FOR NEW LEGISLATORS*

I am greatly honoured to have been invited at the Orientation Programme organized for the newly elected members of the *Jatiya Sangsad* by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.

At the outset, I convey my warm felicitations to Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina on her election as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and wish her the very best in her endeavours. I would also like to heartily compliment Hon'ble Md. Abdul Hamid on his election as the Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad. On behalf of the people and Parliament of India, and on my own behalf, I congratulate all the Hon'ble members of the Jatiya Sangsad on their victory and wish them all success in the discharge of their parliamentary duties and responsibilities. I also convey my greetings and good wishes to our brothers and sisters of this great country for their happiness and prosperity in the years to come, following their decisive mandate.

Hon'ble members, as the elected representatives of the people, you will have to constantly and vigorously strive for their socio-economic emancipation and overall development of your country. Orientation Programmes like this for the newly elected members are always useful to provide them insight about the working of Parliament which will enable them to serve duly the people through this great institution and properly discharge their duties and functions. I compliment the Jatiya Sangsad and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs for this important initiative and trust that this Orientation Programme will be of great help to all the newly elected members.

Excellencies, the relations between India and Bangladesh are rooted in a shared cultural, economic and political history. Uniquely, we also share the noble vision of the Universal Poet, Kaviguru Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote the National Anthems of our two countries. We have fought together for freedom from foreign rule and emancipation of our citizens. Today, our relationship is guided by the principles of democracy, non-alignment and mutual friendship. We have worked together with common goals and

* At the Orientation Programme for the members of the *Jatiya Sangsad* (Parliament of Bangladesh), Dhaka (22 February 2009).

aspirations in the past and we look forward to continued interaction at various levels in the future too, to promote the cause of peace and prosperity of our peoples. We should maintain regular and greater interactions at the parliamentary level between our two countries for our mutual benefit. I feel privileged to be here today to share with you some of my own experiences on building successful parliamentary institutions from the perspective of the role played by the elected representatives of the people and working out benchmarks for our legislative institutions.

As we all know, in parliamentary democracy, which is the most widely accepted form of governance the world over, the Legislatures are bestowed with the immense responsibility of guiding the destiny of their nations and, therefore, constantly remain at the centre-stage of their democratic polities. They have a paramount role to play in making sure that the fundamental laws of the land keep pace with the changing needs of the constantly evolving society. But the content and quality of parliamentary democracy largely depends on how smoothly and effectively the Legislative Bodies perform while discharging their responsibilities. In fact, the Legislatures symbolize the urges, aspirations and expectations of the people and with the unprecedented growth in the range and magnitude of governmental activities, their responsibilities have further increased. Of late, several new areas of public importance have emerged necessitating enactment of new legislations. This apart, the number of policies and programmes in diverse areas of public importance has increased manifold, making the legislative and surveillance roles of modern Legislatures more diversified and complex.

Legislatures have multi-dimensional functions to perform—ranging from ventilating people's grievances to making laws, to debating policies and subjects of public importance and to keeping surveillance over the administration. Naturally, in democracy, the people while casting their votes, hope for improvement in their living conditions, redressal of their day-to-day problems and the overall development of the country. The people always expect that those who represent them in the supreme democratic institution discharge their duties with total commitment and utmost sincerity and their elected representatives should strive to live up to the expectations of the people.

After having spent nearly four decades as a member of Parliament, and the last nearly five years as the Speaker of Lok Sabha, I would say that the credibility of Parliament as the supreme representative institution eventually depends on the performance of the parliamentarians—individually as well as collectively. A member of Parliament, on his election, is entrusted with onerous responsibilities and is expected to perform a variety of roles both inside and outside the House. He comes to Parliament with enormous

obligations on his shoulders and in the discharge of his parliamentary duties, he or she must have a good grasp of the rules of procedure and conduct of parliamentary business. It is, essential for those elected for the first time to familiarize themselves with various parliamentary procedural concepts to discharge his or her functions adequately.

As you all know, Parliament functions through debates, discussions and consensus, and it can only do so if the deliberations are marked by a sense of commitment to the cause of the people and the atmosphere in the House is kept free from bitterness and acrimony. The effectiveness of the functioning of the Houses of Parliament depends, to a great extent, upon how scrupulously the members follow various rules and guidelines which are a prerequisite for the orderly transaction of parliamentary business. Only when members get well acquainted with the Rules of Procedure do they get the confidence to participate in the proceedings of the House and their participation becomes effective and meaningful. Unless the rules, regulations and well-established parliamentary conventions are respected by each and every member and unless the members exhibit mutual accommodation and respect whenever there are differing points of view, parliamentary democracy will not be a working democracy, as the people want.

There are conventions and rules of parliamentary etiquette, which have to be observed by every member in the interest of parliamentary decorum. members should also be well-conversant with their rights and privileges individually and that of the House collectively. In this context, it is essential that members attend the House regularly. It is not necessary that they should participate in every discussion but by being present in the House, they will get to listen to the other members deliberating on issues of contemporaneous relevance and benefit from such discussions. It is equally important for new members to observe the performance of senior parliamentarians and get enlightened from their rich and varied parliamentary understanding and experience.

An important quality required in a legislator is the habit of listening to differing perceptions and respecting dissenting opinions. Your willingness to listen to others' points of view, especially that of your political adversaries is the test for your own democratic credentials. You should listen to others without interruption and then refute them, if you want to, with your own convincing reasons. Let us remember at all points of time that democracy is a system of alternatives—of alternative parties, alternative policies, alternative principles, alternative approaches and alternative leaders. The Treasury Benches and the Opposition have equal responsibilities in ensuring good governance in the country. While discharging their parliamentary responsibilities, both sides are expected to be accommodating and forbearing

towards each other, particularly when contentious issues are debated on the floor of the House. In a democracy, today's Opposition Party could be tomorrow's Ruling Party and *vice-versa*. This fact enjoins upon all sections of the House to display a very high degree of tolerance to the views and stances of other parties discharging their parliamentary duties.

As one who has spent almost all my parliamentary life in the Opposition Benches, I can say with some authority that one important aspect of the political dimension of parliamentary democracy is a strong Opposition in the Legislature. As a matter of fact, parliamentary system operates better when there is a vigilant and responsible Opposition which is entitled to articulate its programmes and policies as is the Government. While the Treasury Bench has the mandate to rule, the Opposition has to keep an unremitting vigil on the acts of omission and commission of the Government. Constructive criticism backed by viable alternative approaches, definitely helps democracy deliver better. Hence, whenever issues having a bearing on the larger interests of the State come up for discussion in the House, each member of the Legislature must act in a non-partisan manner. Undeniably, tolerance is the basic tenet of democracy.

More than anything else, I would humbly beseech you to show respect to the Presiding Officer who is the custodian of your rights and privileges. He is elected by you to enable the smooth and orderly conduct of the House and to regulate its business according to the rules which you yourself have drawn up. In every way, the Speaker is the voice of the House, representing as he does the dignity of the House. Needless to say, the Chair deserves utmost consideration from all sections of the House if he has to function effectively. If one questions his decisions or interferes with his authority, one is lowering the prestige of the Chair and the House as such. That being so, members should extend unstinted cooperation to the Presiding Officer to enhance the dignity and prestige of the House.

I understand that, as in other Parliaments, the Parliament of Bangladesh has also a well-developed system of Committees to transact various kinds of parliamentary business and also to ensure the accountability of the Government Departments in an organized manner. Many of you will be getting opportunity to serve on various Committees of your Parliament. Since the Committee work is as important as the work of the House, you all are expected to take keen interest in the Committee system to make your participation meaningful in the parliamentary business. I can say from my own experience that Parliamentary Committees will offer all members an opportunity to specialize in an area of their interest and to work more effectively towards securing Executive accountability to the Legislature.

I would like to reiterate that it is a privilege to be a member of Parliament which also carries with it tremendous responsibility too and that is where setting benchmarks becomes important. When you are filing your nomination, you are also giving a solemn undertaking to your constituents that you will at all times be striving for their welfare. You may be a member of a party which put you up as a candidate. That is another loyalty you will have to reconcile while representing your people who are the ultimate masters in a democracy. That, perhaps, is the most significant aspect that you should ever remember. Mahatma Gandhi once said: "It is an illusion to think that the MLAs are the guides of the voters. Voters do not send representatives to the Assemblies in order to be guided by them. On the contrary, they are sent there loyally to carry out the people's wishes. The people are, therefore, the guides, not the MLAs. The latter are the servants, the former masters". This also enjoins upon the representatives to constantly apprise their electorate about various actions and initiatives taken by them as also the Government to ameliorate their lot. He must strive to understand the pulse of the people and act in such manner that facilitates harmonizing judiciously the competing roles that he has to play as an elected representative.

It is perhaps a common experience that deliberations in Parliament are often interrupted for reasons and by methods which are very difficult to justify. I can say from my own experience that several times the senseless and sometimes motivated interruptions lead to pandemonium inside the House causing non-completion of the scheduled business and the resultant loss of the precious time of the House and wastage of public money, which democracies like ours can ill afford. If the legislators themselves show lack of commitment to parliamentary behaviour and are perceived to be unconcerned about the discharge of their responsibilities, the people, specially the youth who are our future leaders, will lose faith in the system as a whole, resulting ultimately in total chaos which, in turn, will lead to anarchy and instability, the ultimate victims of which again will be the people themselves.

It hardly needs to be emphasized that you should always bear in mind the fact that each one of you is a representative and a leader of the people at one and the same time. Restoring the trust of the people in parliamentary democracy when there is a crisis of credibility of its institutions is the biggest challenge before us today.

It is necessary that Legislatures should take appropriate initiatives not merely for capacity building of members and staff, but also to communicate Parliament to the people. In the Lok Sabha, as Speaker, I took the initiative of setting up five Parliamentary Fora, *viz.* on Water Conservation and Management; Youth; Children; Population and Public Health; and Global Warming and Climate Change, with a view to providing our parliamentarians

a platform to exchange ideas, views, experiences, expertise and practices in respect of their mandate with experts, civil society groups, other stakeholders, etc. I also started a Lecture Series for members of Parliament on subjects of topical interest. Experts in different fields from India and abroad, including from international bodies, and social activists, have shared their views and experiences with members of Parliament. Besides, I set up in August 2006 the Parliament Museum which is designed to highlight India's rich democratic heritage. This high-tech Museum, which is visited by a large number of people, especially students, imparts knowledge in an interesting and interactive manner on the evolution of political institutions, constitutional history and parliamentary development in our country.

I have always held the view that the people of the country have every right to know of the functioning of the Parliament and of their elected representatives. Such an understanding would help them take informed decisions at the time of elections which would also help to evolve an informed democracy. With this in mind, I launched a 24-hour Lok Sabha Channel on 24 July 2006. Apart from live telecast of Lok Sabha proceedings, the Channel telecasts a large number of value added informative programmes involving parliamentarians, political leaders, civil society activists, academics, experts and others. Undoubtedly, this has gone a long way in taking Parliament nearer to the people and in the process, demanding new benchmarks from our parliamentarians.

In fact, it is the Legislature which is responsible for the sound health of democracy. The Legislature needs to operate within the framework of well-defined benchmarks with due respect to the representative character of the Legislatures, thereby ensuring their independence, effectiveness and accountability.

Excellencies, in an increasingly inter-dependent world, it is imperative that all stakeholders should take concerted action to promote consultation and cooperation. This should particularly be so in respect of the elected representatives of the people. Parliamentary diplomacy and inter-parliamentary cooperation can augment and supplement governmental efforts to buttress cooperative relations among countries. Conferences, Seminars and Workshops of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association provide ample opportunities for debates and discussions on issues of topical concern and to arrive at viable solutions in addressing the challenges before us. I recall that the 53rd CPA Conference which we successfully organized in September 2007 in New Delhi had facilitated very informed discussions among the parliamentary fraternity, besides promoting greater interaction among parliamentarians from the Commonwealth community. The Association of SAARC Speakers and

Parliamentarians offers parliamentarians from our region to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding. Besides enabling us to consolidate democracy, such endeavours will also help to promote resolution of outstanding problems in an amicable manner, in addition to encouraging greater people-to-people contacts, thereby strengthening democratic institutions everywhere. In this context, I would like to share with you that we have in our Parliament, Parliamentary Friendship Groups with a large number of countries to have more focussed and continuous interactions with parliamentarians of those countries and to promote bilateral relations. I am confident that the Parliamentary Friendship Group that we have in our Parliament *vis-a-vis* Bangladesh will play a proactive role to bolster our bilateral ties both at the governmental and parliamentary level, and help to serve greater people-to-people contacts.

Honourable members, being the people's representatives in the apex parliamentary institution of your country, you hold the potential to usher in a new era of peace and prosperity in your country as well as in the entire South Asia region. India has gained a lot of experience in working parliamentary institutions successfully, in spite of several aberrations. I would like to mention here that we in India have a specialized parliamentary training institute called the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training which has been in operation since 1976. The BPST, in which officers from the Bangladesh Parliament have also undergone training at various points of time, provides parliamentarians and parliamentary officials with institutional opportunities for problem-oriented studies and systematic training in various disciplines of parliamentary institutions, processes and procedures. We will indeed be pleased to share our experiences with sister Parliaments, especially those of our neighbours, to the benefit of all of us.

Excellencies, on 4th June 2004, I had the honour of being elected as the Speaker of Lok Sabha. Replying to the warm and gracious sentiments expressed by all sections of the House, I had said: "We should ask ourselves when the House rises for the day every evening as to what we have done during the day for the country and for the people and whether we have justified the people's faith in sending us here. Nothing will give us more satisfaction than the feeling that we have tried and done our best". As one who has spent four decades in the Lok Sabha, this will be my humble message to my fellow parliamentarians in the Jatiya Sangsad.

I trust that this Orientation Programme being organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the Jatiya Sangsad will help you further your capabilities and equip you adequately to undertake your new responsibilities with greater zeal and enthusiasm. I am confident that you all would discharge your duties as parliamentarians with devotion

and commitment and conduct yourselves as examples to be emulated by others. I am sure you will prove to be effective and devoted parliamentarians, Ministers, leaders and statesmen of tomorrow who would enhance the rich traditions and lofty ideals of your great country. Once again, on behalf of people and Parliament of India, I wish you all the very best in your endeavours for securing peace and prosperity for the friendly people of Bangladesh.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again thank His Excellency Md. Abdul Hamid, Honourable Speaker, Jatiya Sangsad, for giving me an opportunity to share my views with the newly elected members of the Jatiya Sangsad.

Thank you.

FOURTEENTH LOK SABHA : AN INTROSPECTION*

I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to all sections of the House for the support and cooperation extended to me in the course of the discharge of my duties as the Presiding Officer of this great Institution. At the end of the last session of the 14th Lok Sabha, I feel that now is the appropriate time to take stock of what this House has been able to achieve in the last five years and make a dispassionate introspection.

Before I proceed, I wish to express my great personal sorrow that today our Hon'ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee are unable to be present here due to their indisposition. On my behalf and on behalf of the House I wish to congratulate the Hon'ble Prime Minister for his successful surgery and I am sure he will soon be able to resume his normal activities with perfect health and vigour.

I also convey on behalf of the House and on my own behalf our best wishes to Vajpayeeji for his speedy and complete recovery. We are happy that he is making good progress on his way to complete recovery.

I also convey my very best wishes to my dear and young friend Shri Priyaranjan Dasmunsi for a speedy and complete recovery.

The 14th Lok Sabha was constituted on 17 May 2004 and the House met for the first time on 2 June 2004. In all, the House had till today, 332 sittings.

On 4 June 2004, the House bestowed great honour upon me by unanimously electing me to the august Office of the Speaker. My colleague, Shri Charnjit Singh Atwal was also unanimously elected as the Deputy Speaker on 9 June 2004. It has been our sincere endeavour to conduct the proceedings and the deliberations of this House to the best of our abilities and in an impartial manner and uphold the dignity of the House. I also express my deep gratitude to the distinguished Chairmen on the Panel for the most conscientious and able manner in which they conducted the proceedings of the House.

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* Valedictory Address at the end of the last sitting of the 14th Lok Sabha, New Delhi (26 February 2009).

As the Presiding Officer of this august House, it has always been my humble endeavour to promote quality debate on all issues by giving opportunities to all sections of the political spectrum in the House and to facilitate smooth and orderly transaction of the business in the House. To this end, I initiated several procedural reforms such as meeting with the Leaders of Parties and Groups daily half-an-hour before the start of the day's proceedings to seek cooperation and support in obviating disruptions and disturbances in the House. As every minute and hour of the time of the House is precious, I started the practice of making a weekly Statement every Tuesday on the business transacted by the House to make every member aware of the time well spent and the time wasted in the House.

As the Hon'ble members are aware, much of the work of the House is done now by the Committees. The Parliamentary Committees have, during the past five years, done excellent work. The Departmentally Related Standing Committees have been restructured and their number has been increased to 24 and their jurisdiction defined. This restructuring intended to bring about an improvement in the examination and scrutiny of the Demands for Grants of the Ministries and Departments has served its purpose towards ensuring effective Parliamentary scrutiny of executive actions as envisaged in our Constitutional Scheme.

The Parliamentary Standing Committees and the Parliamentary Committees functioned effectively and efficiently during the present Lok Sabha and made many important recommendations. The Standing Committees of Lok Sabha presented as many as 626 Reports. I am happy to record that the Hon'ble members almost on all occasions considered the issues and problems which came before the Committees in a non-partisan manner.

As the Hon'ble members are aware, a new Direction 73A was incorporated in the Directions by the Speaker which made it incumbent on all the Ministers to make a statement in the House, on the status of implementation of the various recommendation/observations made by the Standing Committees in their reports within six months of their presentation in the House. In this context, the Ministers made 388 statements regarding the status of implementation of the Recommendations/Observations contained in the Reports of the Standing Committees.

Putting questions is an important instrument in the hands of the members to scrutinize the functioning of the executive. In the 14th Lok Sabha, 6218 starred questions were listed, out of which 963 Questions were answered orally. I tried my best to give opportunity to members belonging to different parties, large or small. Written replies to the remaining Starred Questions along with 60,419 Unstarred questions were laid on the Table.

Fourteen half-an-hour discussions were also taken up. Five Short Notice Questions were also answered.

The 14th Lok Sabha enacted 258 Legislations including Right to Information Act, 2005; the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005; the Protection for Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005; the Disaster Management Act, 2005; the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005; the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006; the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008; the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008 and the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2009.

Personally it is a matter of great regret to me that we have not been able, during my tenure, to pass the Women's Reservation Bill which to my mind would have gone a long way towards genuine and effective empowerment of fifty per cent of our population. The Women's Reservation Bill has now been introduced in the Rajya Sabha during the 2008 Budget Session to ensure that the Bill does not lapse with the dissolution of the 14th Lok Sabha. I am hopeful that all political parties will reach unanimity to evolve a clear consensus on the issue in the next Lok Sabha.

Coming to Private members' Business, 327 Private members' Bills were introduced during the 14th Lok Sabha. Nine Private members' Resolutions on important subjects were moved.

During this Lok Sabha, 3,444 matters of urgent public importance were raised by the members after the Question Hour and at the end of the sitting for the day. Hon. members also raised 3,485 matters under rule 377. As the Presiding Officer, I had humbly tried to allow the members maximum opportunity to raise matters of importance. As a part of this approach, I allowed a larger number of matters under Calling Attention as compared to the number in the earlier Lok Sabha, which helped the members in getting response from the Ministers to the matters raised by them. In fact, 115 Calling Attention matters were raised during this period. The Ministers made 266 statements on various important subjects, which also include the statements made by the Hon'ble Prime Minister.

In recognition of the right of the Opposition to move Adjournment Motions on urgent issues, I tried my best to allow a number of them consistent with the provisions of the Rules, many more than allowed earlier.

In this context, I would like to recall some landmark decisions that were taken during the 14th Lok Sabha. As the custodian of the rights and privileges of the House and with a view to maintaining the dignity and authority of Parliament, I had to take painful decisions. Ten members had to be expelled

from the membership of the House for their involvement in the cash-for-query scam. Another four members had to face suspension of their membership of the House for a certain period for irregularities in the implementation of the MPLAD Scheme. I had also the painful duty to constitute several Committees to inquire into alleged misconduct of members as in the alleged human trafficking case and the alleged bribery scam prompted by the unsightly display of wads of currency notes in the well of the House during the debate on the Trust Vote in July 2008. Some other members had to face expulsion from the membership of the House through disqualification under the Anti-Defection Act. In all such actions, this House has shown exemplary commitment to cleanse itself of the erring members and a firm resolve to adhere to the code of conduct expected from people's representatives, and this process of self-cleansing must continue whenever there arises any such occasion in the future also.

Outside the procedural plane, several other initiatives were taken during the life of the 14th Lok Sabha. The constitution of the Parliamentary Forums on different topical issues was one such significant development. We now have five Parliamentary Forums: one each on Water Conservation and Management; Youth; Children; Population and Public Health; and Global Warming and Climate Change. The underlying idea has been to provide members an important platform to interact with subject experts and key officials of the Ministries concerned. These Forums have been useful in equipping the Hon'ble members with information and knowledge on specific issues and in helping them to adopt a result-oriented approach in dealing with particular issues. Member-Convenors have been appointed for each Forum and they have been very active in organizing several Programmes of interest to the members during Parliament sessions.

During Fourteenth Lok Sabha, a Lecture Series was instituted for members of Parliament at the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training to sensitize them on issues of topical concern and contemporary problems having a bearing on our socio-economic situation. So far, twenty-four Lectures on various issues have been organized in which experts from India and abroad shared their perspectives with Hon'ble members. The keen interest taken by Hon'ble members and the meaningful interactions they had with the experts are indeed heartwarming.

I mooted the idea of an autonomous Salaries Commission for members of Parliament which was accepted, in principle, by the Government.

A prestigious Annual Parliamentary Lecture has also been instituted in memory of one of India's most outstanding parliamentarians, Prof. Hiren Mukerjee. The Inaugural Lecture on the theme 'Demands of Social Justice' was delivered by the Nobel Laureate and Lamont Professor at the Harvard University,

Prof. Amartya Sen, in the Central Hall on 11 August 2008. I believe all these initiatives have been received well and with good results and hope that members in the future also will continue to hold the same for which eminent persons will be invited to speak on important subjects.

Two Round Table Discussions involving major stakeholders were also organized by the Lok Sabha on the theme 'Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy'. The first Round Table was held on 4 September 2008 and the second one on 1 November 2008. Both the Round Table Discussions were interactive and addressed by very distinguished and eminent parliamentarians, jurists, journalists and civil society leaders. The deliberations were stimulating and thought provoking with the distinguished participants sharing their informed viewpoints on the state of our parliamentary democracy.

To take the institution of Parliament nearer to the people, I have the great satisfaction in being able to launch the Lok Sabha Television Channel (LSTV). With the introduction of the 24-hour TV Channel exclusively devoted to telecasting live all proceedings of the House, our people would be able to see the way their representatives discharge their responsibilities inside the Chamber of the Lok Sabha, and find it as an effective interface among the people, Parliament and the Government. Besides the coverage of parliamentary proceedings, several value-added programmes are telecast whereby parliamentarians participate in various programmes on contemporary topics and articulate the stand of their respective Parties on important political, economic and international issues. The Channel also telecasts plays, cultural programmes, films and documentaries on our heritage, beliefs, traditions, music and dance. We feel proud that this is the only TV Channel in the world which is owned and operated by Parliament, without any executive control or even intervention. I conceived the idea of starting a TV Channel for bringing the people close to Parliament and also to extend the space for the Visitors' Gallery to every home to let the country see what Parliament is doing. As the people are our real masters, they have the right to know how their representatives are serving them and the Nation as a whole.

Recognising the important role that the Media plays, I had regular interactions with the editors and senior journalists during the Parliament Session and exhorted them to improve the coverage of the proceedings of the House. I do believe that as a result of these interactions the coverage has improved, though it is not yet in ample measure. A Panel of Experts was also constituted comprising among others media personalities to advise me on these aspects.

Another important initiative to bring Parliament closer to the people has been the setting up of the state-of-the-art Parliament Museum. The Museum, which was inaugurated by the then *Rashtrapatiji* Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on 14 August, 2006 and is open to the public, has been designed to serve as a hi-tech, story-telling Museum, depicting the continuum of democratic ethos and institutional development in India. The Lok Sabha Television and the Parliament Museum have been lauded by one and all, as important initiatives that would help to strengthen our parliamentary system.

Yet another important initiative has been the widening access which we have facilitated to the Parliament Library. I have endeavoured to ensure that the rich reservoir of knowledge we have in the Parliament Library is also utilized by genuine research scholars from Universities and institutions of repute, journalists, Heads/members of educational institutions and others. We have also set up a Children's Corner in the Parliament Library to cater to the information and knowledge needs of children. It provides opportunities to them to know of our parliamentary framework and about the country's progress and development, specially of matters relating to the children and youth.

With a view to promoting knowledge about parliamentary democracy among the younger generation, we have for the first time started the Lok Sabha Internship Programme. It is a year-long programme which provides an opportunity to five young post-graduates with outstanding academic records to acquaint themselves with the working of parliamentary democracy and democratic institutions, and especially about the Indian parliamentary system.

During the 14th Lok Sabha, we also had the satisfaction of observing two memorable occasions, namely, the 150th anniversary of our First War of Independence and the 60th Year of our Independence, in the Central Hall, which programmes I believe were extremely successful.

I would also take this opportunity to mention that I have initiated a Scholarship Scheme for the wards of Group 'C' and 'D' employees of the Lok Sabha Secretariat who have been admitted in professional courses in the disciplines of Medicine including Ayurvedic and Homoeopathic medicines, disciplines of Engineering, Chartered Accountancy, MBA, LL.B. and Architecture.

Under this Scholarship Scheme, six wards one in each field mentioned above shall be granted the sum total of the tuition fee of the course charged by the Institution/College wherein the ward has been selected for pursuing his/her studies.

On this occasion I would again recall the supreme sacrifice that an Official of the Hindustan Petroleum Corporation, Shri Rajeev Saraswat made while he was working as in-charge of the Control Room for the Parliamentary Committee on Subordinate Legislation at the Taj Mahal Hotel, one of the several places attacked during the dastardly terrorist assault in the city of Mumbai.

On behalf of the House, I had communicated our deepest condolences, to the Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation and to the bereaved family. In this context, I would like to inform that the Lok Sabha Secretariat has given *ex-gratia* amount to the family of the deceased and I have recommended to the Government to allot a petrol pump to his family to secure their future.

These are some of the humble initiatives which the Presiding Officer took during this Lok Sabha with a view to strengthening the institution of Parliament. I must gratefully acknowledge the fact that I received unstinted cooperation and support from all sections of the House, the Treasury as well as the Opposition Benches, in the discharge of my duties as the Presiding Officer of this House and for the new initiatives.

I will only be betraying my emotions if I do not refer to what I would painfully call certain aberrations and avoidable situations during the life of the 14th Lok Sabha which has somewhat lowered the esteem of this august institution in the eyes of the people. I am pained to say that politics of intense confrontation has gained upper hand with the result that disruptions of the proceedings of the House through sloganeering, coming into the well of the House, walk-outs, etc., have greatly eroded people's faith in the efficacy of this great institution. As we know now, this Lok Sabha spent a total of 1738 hrs. 45 mts. on actual sittings and wasted 423 hrs. at the end of the 15th Session. The time wasted in disruptions and adjournments due to disorderly scenes amounted to a total of about 24 per cent of the time of the House which is very alarming.

The very edifice of parliamentary system of government is grounded in the clear delineation of powers and functions of the three different organs of the Government—the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. As such, Parliament is the supreme law-making body which has exclusive powers to regulate its own proceedings and to discipline its members. As the custodian of parliamentary rights and privileges, it fell upon me to defend and safeguard the rights and privileges of Parliament, and Legislatures across the country. Members will recall that in March 2005, on a dispute that arose over the decision of the Jharkhand Governor in appointing the Chief Minister, the Supreme Court passed an interim order which *inter alia* contained directions

to the Presiding Officer on fixing of agenda of the House, maintenance of order and video recording of the proceedings in the House. Such matters fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Presiding Officer of every Legislature under the Constitution, the Rules of the House and even by convention. I had to assert the supremacy of the Legislature in its exclusive domain, and in all this, I had ultimately the concurrence and support of all the Leaders of Parties in Parliament and the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, for which I am grateful to them.

Another such occasion arose when the expelled members in the cash-for-query scam filed writ petitions in the Supreme Court challenging their expulsion. As the Presiding Officer of the Lok Sabha, I had to defend the rights of this House to deal with all matters relating to discipline and misconduct of the members and to make it clear that the votes given by the members inside the Chambers of Parliament cannot be questioned in a court of law. The Supreme Court subsequently dismissed the writ petitions and recognized the position that I took, that was endorsed by all sections of the House as well as the Emergency Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India.

As we adjourn *sine die* today, it is a mixed feeling that I have—I have a feeling of quiet satisfaction, which I share with you in all humility, that I have honestly tried to uphold the dignity and prestige of the high constitutional office of the Speaker in regulating the proceedings of this House in the highest parliamentary traditions and in affording all opportunities to Hon'ble members to participate in the proceedings and express their voices. In discharging my duty, it has been my endeavour to protect to the best of my ability the rights and privileges of the House and the Hon'ble members irrespective of their political affiliations and to further enhance the functioning of our parliamentary system.

Once again I would like to express my gratitude to all sections of the House for their support and cooperation, notwithstanding the unkept assurances and frustration and disappointments at times, in discharging my duties and responsibilities as the Presiding Officer of this august House. I thank the Hon'ble Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Shri Md. Hamid Ansari, for his active co-operation in coordinating the works of the two Houses of Parliament; the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh; the Hon'ble Leader of the House, Shri Pranab Mukherjee; and the Hon'ble Leader of the Opposition, Shri L.K. Advani, for their support and cooperation in running this House; the Hon'ble Deputy Speaker, Shri Charnjit Singh Atwal, and the members of the Panel of Chairmen for sharing the onerous duty of the Presiding Officer of this House; the Hon'ble Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Shri K. Rahman Khan, for his cooperation; the Leaders of all

Parties and Groups and each and every member of Parliament for their contribution in making our parliamentary democracy work. I shall be failing in my duty, if I do not express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Hon'ble Chairpersons of the UPA and NDA for all the respect shown to the Chair and for their kind help and co-operation.

I also extend my gratitude to the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha, Shri P.D.T. Achary, for being a constant source of strength and support in running this august House, and his team of officers and to all the staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat as well as in the Speaker's Office for their committed efficient and professional handling of all works related to the Lok Sabha. I also put on record my thanks to all the media persons accredited to covering the work of Parliament and the media in general for being a vigilant watchdog of democracy.

I also appreciate the services of the Watch & Ward Staff, CRPF, Delhi Police and other security agencies who are vigilantly protecting the Parliament House Complex. I also thank the CPWD including the Horticulture Department and other allied agencies which have rendered their valuable support.

Hon'ble members, along with Fourteenth Lok Sabha which for all effective purposes is coming to an end today, I am also reaching my journey's end and in a short while I shall be leaving this Chamber for the last time. I seek your kind indulgence for referring to my feelings on this occasion, when I shall be finally dissociating from this great Institution. As an humble servant of the House of the People, I have had the great opportunity to serve the nation through this great Institution for nearly 39 years with a short break of eleven months. I recall vividly that in the Fifth Lok Sabha I was allotted seat No. 512 from where I had the privilege to listen with awe and admiration and as attentively as possible some of the memorable speeches delivered by the outstanding parliamentarians. I had the great opportunity to serve the people of the country as a member of this august House from the 5th to 14th Lok Sabha. I was the Leader of the Party in the Lok Sabha for 15 years till my election as Speaker. As the Leader it was my duty to see that issues of the working class and vulnerable sections of the society were duly raised in the House. Lok Sabha provides the most important forum for articulating the urges and aspirations of the people and for raising matters of concern for the peasants and workers and for the common people of the country. I cannot but recall the great guidance and encouragement and affection that I received from my leaders, particularly Comrade Jyoti Basu. I am grateful to the Indian Parliamentary Group that selected me for the conferment of the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award in the year 1996.

I respectfully submit that as the Presiding Officer, I tried honestly and sincerely to uphold the highest traditions of the Parliamentary Institution and discharged my duties to the best of my ability. I totally dissociated myself from any political activity whatsoever, in keeping with the essence of the Constitution of India, which demands discharge of duties with total impartiality and treat all the members as equal.

In consonance with the spirit of the Constitution, I took a considered decision to stand by the Constitution of India and not allowed myself to take a course of action, which would have, in my view, seriously compromised my position as Speaker of the supreme legislature of the country. But I was completely overwhelmed by the tremendous outpouring of support and appreciation that I received from not only the citizens of this country but also from the Indian diaspora, on what they acknowledged as my principled stand on a very vital issue on the role of the Speaker, keeping the dignity of the Institution and upholding the fundamental principles of the Constitution. I could not compromise on the role and expectations of the Speaker as enshrined in the Constitution.

I wish to sincerely thank all of you once again for the great opportunity that you gave me and during the short time I am left with, I wish to closely follow the functioning of this great Institution for all its glory and greater success.

I beg to convey my best wishes to each one of you for your success in the coming event.

Thank you.

DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: ROLE OF EDUCATION*

It is indeed an honour and a special privilege for me to be invited to deliver the Convocation Address in the intellectually stimulating environs of the historic University of Delhi, one of the premier institutions of higher learning, research and studies in the country. I am grateful to the respected Vice-Chancellor for his kind invitation to me to participate in this important occasion of our country's one of the most prestigious Universities, which has, over the years, produced a large number of eminent scholars in different branches of studies and has also had renowned Professors amongst its Faculties, who moulded thousands of young men and women, with high level of education into individuals of integrity and honour, courage and character, who have made and are making significant contribution in shaping the destiny of our country.

What started off modestly in 1922 with 3 Colleges, 4 Faculties and just 750 students is today one of the most renowned institutions of learning, having 83 Colleges, 14 Faculties and about 2,20,000 students. It is indeed a splendid and proud achievement. Since the days of Dr. H.S. Gour, the first Vice-Chancellor, the University has spread across the city in all directions with its colleges and campuses adorning the landscape of the National Capital and through its well-structured curricular and co-curricular activities, and through innovative teaching and learning methods, has steadily grown in its reputation and acceptance. It is today one of the highly sought-after destinations for higher studies in the country. The Delhi School of Economics has attained great eminence like the London School of Economics. The Faculty of Management Studies has earned an enviable reputation in the corporate world. The Law Faculty has produced many a legal luminary enriching our judicial system. The Arts, Humanities, Science and other faculties too have performed very admirably. It is, indeed, a rare honour and I feel humble to have been asked to deliver the Convocation Address at this great institution with highest intellectual traditions.

At the outset, I would like to offer my heartiest congratulations to the bright young students who have completed their studies by their strenuous work and disciplined effort and are going to receive their honours and degrees

* At the Annual Convocation of the University of Delhi, Delhi (1 March 2009).

today. As they move out of the portals of the campus tomorrow, they will find a new world of challenges and opportunities. I extend my best wishes to all of them and hope that they will make use of their knowledge and training not only for their own career but also for the benefit of the common people and for the overall progress of our country.

It hardly needs to be stated that education is the most effective instrument to acquire knowledge, to nurture social and moral values and to make citizens socially sensitive, responsible and forward looking. In a plural society like ours, it is through broad secular education that we can foster values to promote national integration and harmony among all citizens. Swami Vivekananda had said that it was only through education that 'character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet... .'

One of the major tasks before our Founding Fathers, in the wake of Freedom, was to introduce a comprehensive education system at different levels that could address the developmental challenges of a country then steeped in poverty, ignorance and superstition. It was recognized that only through good education can we produce people who will be proud of their heritage and will strive to take the country forward, after having gone through centuries of subjugation and humiliation, and will also provide the necessary momentum to economic progress, to ensure better quality of life to our people, to help bring about an acceptable level of social and economic equity in the country and to promote the task of our national unity. In the years since independence, in spite of the various adverse circumstances, the country has built up a very large system of education and has produced a vast body of progressively disposed men and women equipped with a high order of scientific and technological capabilities and committed to broader national values.

As Swami Vivekananda said, 'education ... is a process of man-making, character-forming and life-building assimilation of ideas.' Only through education we can equip ourselves to face the challenges of life and only a good educational system can establish a healthy relationship between the individuals and the society. It is education, which makes us better citizens and inculcates in us virtues of tolerance, discipline, commitment, culture, compassion and sensitivity. 'Education', as Nobel Laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen has said, is essentially about 'capacity building and it widens the choice of people and empowers the nations'.

As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "A University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for onward march of the human race towards higher objectives. If the Universities discharge their duties adequately,

then it is well with the nation and the people. But if the temple of learning itself becomes a home of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation progress or a person grow in stature?'

It is heartening that substantial investments in higher education are now being made through the creation of 8 new Indian Institutes of Technology, 7 Indian Institutes of Management, 5 Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research, and 15 New Central Universities, as also the SAARC University and Nalanda International University which are welcome decisions and it is hoped that all of them will be established soon and start functioning. It is necessary that the study of science and technology should be encouraged further and provision should be made for study of subjects like Biotechnology and research oriented courses of study like nanotechnology, robotics and genomics.

We are proud that our scientists have demonstrated more than once that they have the capacity to be the best in the world. We must pay tributes to our scientists for successfully placing into the lunar orbit the Chandrayan-1 spacecraft in November last year. We are proud that India's space technology has earned international acclaim.

It is essential to realize that education alone can bring about democratic consolidation, social cohesiveness and sustained growth. We have to take our whole society along on the path of education and development and should not allow any section to lag behind. Of special importance is the women's education, as they constitute nearly fifty per cent of our population. There is an unacceptably wide disparity between the literacy levels of men and women in our country. Removing the factors that inhibit the full participation of women in the various spheres of society is a very important step for the empowerment of women in our society. To overcome the gap in providing equal opportunity for education we have to employ the full range of educational opportunities and relate them with the available government and private initiatives to the benefit of every segment of our population both in the urban and rural areas. Our educational system must provide a level-playing field to the cross-section of our people. Special attention must also be given to maintain high standards of teaching and the Government should address the problem of the proliferation of inadequately equipped institutions, charging unaffordable fees.

With over a billion population, of which nearly half constitute women, the question of empowerment of women is of very special significance. The country has to put an end to gender bias, outdated values and societal attitudes that inhibit women's effective participation in public affairs and should endeavour to empower women socially, economically and educationally as part of the fundamental rights of women and as their

entitlements as citizens in a democracy, in the evolution of which their contribution has been in no small measure.

Another challenge that we face is to bridge the urban-rural divide in educational investment and opportunities. If we have to maintain our social progress and realize our economic potentials, the concerns of our rural population are to be given adequate attention in our planning processes. Rural India has a vast reservoir of human energy, intelligence and aspirations. Its enormous potential has to be converted into national wealth, by evolving education as an integrated package of traditional know-how, academic knowledge and practical skills, which could support the people to earn livelihood both in rural economy and outside it.

An important area, requiring our attention, to my mind, is that of the quality of research in our institutions of higher learning. Those engaged in research will have to excel in their area of work, and those who guide research should demonstrate a better sense of accountability. Academics should not be seen as just another profession. It is a profession with enormous social responsibilities. Our founding fathers, while establishing institutions of higher learning for independent India, had visualized that they all would, over the years, transform themselves into centres of excellence. India today needs world-class research-based Universities that can support modern research and to compete successfully in the knowledge-driven world of the 21st century. Large-scale development requires a sophisticated and knowledge-based economy. It is for the University system to help sustain that path.

It is also important to bear in mind that the primary social agenda of education is the development of our human resources in the right direction. It is not to be used as a medium to further anyone's narrow political or partisan agenda. Mythological beliefs and matters of faith should not be allowed to interfere with scientific enquiry. Education is essentially about rational enquiry and for a highly pluralistic society like ours, it has to be developed as a harmonizing force rather than as an instrument to promote divisiveness and disunity among the people. Social premium on value of education needs to be emphasized as also the organic link between institutions of higher learning and civil society. A progressive and forward looking education will greatly address our major social evils and will help in strengthening the secular and liberal fabric of our country, remaining sensitive to the specific cultural identities, plural nature of our society, the democratic ethos of our people and to the need for positive dialogue between cultures.

Friends, in the year 2007, we observed the completion of six decades of freedom and also observed the 150th Anniversary of one of the most heroic and epoch-making events in our struggle for freedom—our First War of Independence of 1857. These were occasions to remind ourselves of the values

that guided our Freedom Movement and of the numerous struggles and sacrifices of millions of our people led by broad-minded and visionary men and women, who, motivated only by the good of our country, and not by any self-interest, plunged themselves into that long-drawn struggle, which inspired many young and old alike, to join the nation-wide movement for our freedom in the years that followed. The relentless and uncompromising struggle waged by youthful and revolutionary leaders like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru, Khudiram Bose and many others and their ultimate sacrifice for the cause of freedom, stand out as shining examples of selfless service specially by the youth for the cause of this great country.

Our struggle for Independence was not just a movement to free ourselves from the bondage of the British rule. It was as much a crusade to free ourselves from the various social evils and socio-economic iniquities and discrimination to lift the deprived and the downtrodden from the mire of poverty and exploitation and to give them a stake in the socio-economic transformation of the country. Today, it is for us to introspect and see to what extent have we been able to realise the dreams of the martyrs and leaders of our Freedom Movement and of the Founding Fathers of our Republic. We have to ask ourselves whether we have succeeded in realising their dreams of a resurgent India and an egalitarian society free from class, caste and religious exploitation and from the scourges of poverty and oppression?

Over the six decades of freedom, no doubt, we have registered significant achievements in almost all areas of our national life. At the political level, we gave to ourselves a well-defined and elaborate Constitution that has withstood the test of time. Our democracy has been witness to as many as fourteen General Elections at the Centre and many more elections to the State Legislatures and other representative bodies. In the process, we have consolidated our democratic edifice and emerged as the largest working democracy in the world. Over these years we have striven to improve the quality and content of our democracy by gradually making it more inclusive, people-centric and transparent.

Through several progressive legislations, we have sought to address serious socio-political and developmental issues. Successive 5-Year Plans have helped us in taking substantial sections of our people from below the poverty level to a more meaningful and dignified existence. In recent years, our economy has been growing at a very fast pace. Today, India is acknowledged as a significant player in the world economy.

However, in spite of the substantial progress made in the last six decades, democratic India presents a contrasting picture of affluence and deprivation and India still lives in different centuries. On the one hand is the India of the rich, of those who have had the benefit of modern education and are

intellectually and materially empowered and, on the other, is the India of those who live under conditions of poverty, deprivation, squalour, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices. With a stratified social structure, characterized by inequity, gender-based discrimination, regional imbalances, with a sizeable section living below the poverty line experiencing unemployment and underemployment, and with substantial sections of our people denied of the benefits of modern science and technology, without access to safe drinking water, dependable energy supply, and good health-care, we have to concede that we have not been able to take fullest advantage of democratic governance in the past six decades. The polity fractured on religious, caste, regional and linguistic basis and influenced by confrontational politics is greatly weakening our democratic structure and simultaneously stifling the country's progress, and it needs serious attention and sincere national efforts to reverse the process. In our national endeavour, undoubtedly we have to give priority to the efforts to remove poverty from the country. We have to succeed in achieving full literacy for our people stressing on providing quality education and vocational training.

I would like to take this opportunity to call upon our enterprising youth, specially those who have had the facility of receiving high standard of education, to make their contributions for all-round progress of our country. With nearly 47 per cent of our population being young, India has enormous human resource, which can help in bringing about fundamental changes by contributing to the process of accelerated growth and development and indeed we have the potential and the resources to become a vibrant and achieving nation.

The new economic forces of today are bringing along with them new opportunities for development and for contributing to nation-building. But we must ensure that we do not leave anyone behind and that the benefits of development reach every one.

Friends, these are indeed challenging times for the nation. There is, no doubt, cynicism among the people, particularly the youth, about the functioning of our political institutions. Today we have a fractured polity in the country, which is almost totally governed by politics of confrontation, if not hatred of each other. Such confrontational politics has made caste, creed, language, region and religion divisive issues, seeking to mould public opinion around them and sections of our political spectrum is depending on the same to get political advantage by emphasizing on issues that divide the people than what unite them. Sections of our society are beginning to ignore our most cherished national values such as secularism, socialism, respect for pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance and co-existence for the sake of power. In such a scenario every responsible citizen, particularly the youth has a

crucial role to play. It is expected of every citizen to do everything possible to help reinforce among our people the value of respect for our democracy and feeling of inclusiveness, so that our democratic polity and national fabric are strengthened.

If we have to sustain our people's faith in the democratic institutions, we shall have to bring about integrity in our public life. Communalisation and criminalisation of politics has greatly vitiated our political system. The malaise of corruption and the influence of money and muscle power along with the use of religion in our electoral process and the resultant aberrations of our political functioning are matters that should engage the attention of all responsible citizens. Degeneration of the electoral system, as a result of the illegal and immoral practices used in many places for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity and contributing to the growing political apathy among the people. We need to seriously ponder and address these issues urgently. We must recognize that democracy is not all about periodic elections and the political rights alone. It is fundamentally about providing for the basic needs of the people.

Most unfortunately and rather alarmingly, issues like intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, confrontations and disrespect for dissent are increasingly vitiating our socio-political system. The cynicism that is creeping into the minds of the people, specially the youth, about the functioning of our democratic structure is undoubtedly a matter of grave concern. The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms.

Parliamentary democracy can become meaningful for the people only when all our institutions that constitute our governance structure perform at their best keeping the interest of the people and the country in mind and in conformity with the fundamental law of the land, our Constitution. The Executive has to be seen to be functioning to address the concerns of the people, the Legislature reflecting their urges and aspirations and the larger national causes as opposed to narrow partisan politics and the Judiciary, as an independent arbiter, dispensing speedy and inexpensive justice to every section of the people.

I must accept the position that members of Parliament and our representative bodies too need to do much introspection on their role and functions, especially in the context of the disillusionment of the people with their overall conduct and demeanour. Sadly, the image of Parliament and its members, rather the political class as a whole, reached its nadir in the wake of the unprecedented shameful events that happened on the floor of the Lok Sabha on 22 July 2008. If urgent corrective measures are not taken

proactively by all concerned, it will create serious problems for the future of our democracy. Without people's trust and confidence, no system can survive for long. To redeem the people's trust and to consolidate our hard-won freedom, all stakeholders of democracy, have to work in concert. I am of the firm opinion that there is no alternative for us but to strengthen the structure that we have. Our common people have already identified themselves totally with the system. It is for all of us together to address the imperfections and shortcomings, within the framework of the system. Since it is out of our Parliament that the leadership that runs the affairs of our country emerges, we have to ensure that people with commitment and dedication to the cause of the people come into it and have the opportunity to actively participate in working the system which will have its due impact on the quality of living of the people.

Only in the hands of a united and an eternally vigilant citizenry will our democracy be safe. A great responsibility is thus cast upon all of us in sustaining Parliamentary democracy, our freedom and democratic rights, and, more than anything else, in sustaining our people's faith in the institutions of our democracy.

But are we all, specially the young educated sections of the community, to remain as mute spectators to these aberrations in our system? Who is to redeem the system and make it work for the benefit of the nation as a whole? If our youth, to whom tomorrow belongs and as such have the greatest stake in the system, suffer from cynicism and do not come forward to shoulder the responsibilities as citizens in a democracy, who else will act as the catalyst for positive changes in our society?

My young friends, you have to be the crusaders for removing the various ills plaguing our society and to provide leadership to change the system for the better. It is of little use to be just critical of the aberrations or non-achievements in the society. You have to be participants in bringing about the change and not be mere critics. The country has great expectations from its youth to bring in the freshness of their approach along with youthful energy and passion to address the imperfections in the institutions of democracy. They have to realize their obligations and become more pro-active participants at all levels of political and other institutions.

Much greater future awaits our young people and they should be the harbingers of the new era. Sweeping changes in our society and in our political and economic life can only be brought about if our youth come forward to play a more active role in the social and political life. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, 'when the *status quo* itself is rank injustice, those who desire to maintain it must be considered upholders of that injustice'. Democracy is only as good as its people. It can become meaningful when educated persons,

committed to national causes, come forward to eliminate the shortcomings in the system. If you all cherish and uphold the principles of secularism, pluralism and inclusiveness, who can undermine our national unity and social cohesiveness? And conversely, if you surrender to the divisive and communal approaches, can any one save this country?

Even the worst critics of our system have not come up with a better alternative to parliamentary democracy as yet. Our Parliament still remains the most potent vehicle for translating the people's expectations into reality, to bring about socio-economic and political transformation in the country. To make our Parliament and political system more effective, the country requires larger number of committed and well-meaning youth, positively and progressively disposed towards people's problems, to come forward to occupy the political space.

Remember, whether you like it or not, whether you involve yourself in it or not, politics decides your and the country's future. If you only express your disapproval of the overall functioning of our democracy, you may only remain a passive spectator. It is time you offered your services to the country. Representative institutions are people's institutions and as such they are not to be looked down upon but instead they should be treated as the best avenue for public service and for contributing to the process of taking our great country to its rightful place among the comity of nations. Remember that only democracy gives you the power to participate in the nation's affairs, express your opinion and thus to be counted in the political processes.

We have too many unrealistic critics who themselves do not want to play or recognize any role in restoring politics into the framework of an acceptable value system, but not many who want to intervene pro-actively to correct the aberrations. Everyone seems to think that it is sufficient to point out the defects in the system and be a critic only and it is someone else's responsibility to bring about the changes.

I would, therefore, expect the new graduates to carry with them an optimism permeated by activism when they are leaving the caring portals of their University. They should be agents of change and be committed to the creation of a society that is just, secular and democratic and will promote human excellence. My request to all those who are passing out of this great institution is that they should always be imbibed with the mission in their future life to serve the nation and the people.

Shunning all divisive thoughts and actions, our people, specially the youth, as citizens of free India, a great country with a great heritage and tremendous potential and opportunities, should work unitedly for reaching greater and greater heights. We must tear down the walls that create obstacles

in our march to the future as a united nation. There is no alternative to living with the spirit of universal brotherhood, as Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore preached.

Providing one billion Indians with the freedom to engage in a productive life and to gain the consequent rewards as individuals and as the members of the society is a gigantic challenge which can be met only through the collective endeavours of all stakeholders. Whichever party or parties may be in power, the nation as a whole must effectively deal with the problems of poverty, unemployment and underemployment on a war-footing, channelising the fruits of sustained economic growth in recent years. Development and planning for progress should never be the subject of mutual recrimination. Socio-economic uplift of India's masses should not be a matter of theoretical political ideology or political rhetoric, and is the most crucial area warranting political consensus.

My young friends, learning is a lifelong process, which does not end within the four walls of the academic institutions. As you step out of the corridors of your University, a wholly new and exciting world of challenges and opportunities awaits you. Your ability to convert every challenge into an opportunity will decide your own future and through you that of our country. I am confident that with the kind of orientation provided by your esteemed institution, you will be able to realize fully your dreams and aspirations in the years to come. I also trust that you will use the education that you have received here and the values inculcated in you to achieve our larger national goals.

Remember that the future does not belong to those who are content with today, indifferent towards common problems and their fellow man alike, timid and fearful in the face of new ideas and bold initiatives. It will belong to those who are ever receptive to new ideas and are willing to experiment with them in the interest of the world around them. It is this quality that I would expect the new graduates to carry with them when they are leaving the protective portals of their University.

Friends, Convocation is a landmark in the lives of the students and the faculty. It is an opportunity for the University to take stock of what it has achieved and what it has to aspire for. For all those who pass out today, the coming years would open up various opportunities and also problems. Only with total commitment and dedication to the causes with which you get to associate in the years ahead, will you be able to make a mark on the society around you. It is in your ability to make that mark that the meaning, the content and the quality of the valuable years that you have spent in this great institution of higher learning will have to be demonstrated. I hope the scholars will work hard to secure a bright future for themselves and for the country

and by remaining firmly committed to certain ideals, by staying on the path of truth, justice and probity, fighting against social evils and by dedicating themselves to the service of the nation, they all will strive to make a difference to the world around them.

I hope this University, which is synonymous with excellence, will continue to produce committed, responsible, disciplined, well-integrated and socially sensitive citizens who will be assets of our country. I convey my best wishes to all of you.

Once again, I extend my sincere gratitude to the distinguished Vice-Chancellor and his colleagues of the University for giving me this opportunity to be with you all on this momentous occasion.

Thank you.

IMPORTANCE OF VALUE BASED POLITICS*

I feel greatly honoured to have been invited to deliver this Lecture in memory of an outstanding Indian and a great humanist, late Dr. Triguna Sen. I am grateful to the National Council of Education, Bengal, for giving me an opportunity to pay my respectful homage to his memory.

Dr. Triguna Sen was a multifaceted personality. An eminent educationist, ardent freedom fighter, able administrator and a very conscientious parliamentarian, Dr. Sen remained, throughout his life, closely associated with a range of institutional endeavours towards promotion of education and related issues. He was highly committed to the cause of imparting quality education in diverse disciplines, especially in science and technology, and the establishment of the Jadavpur University in 1955 was indeed the result of his sustained efforts. In his capacity, first as the Rector and later as the Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University, he unrelentingly worked for the growth of the University and his contributions remain unparalleled in making the University into a premier institute of learning in India. Though he was associated with many other institutions of eminence, prominent among them being the Banaras Hindu University, where he was the Vice-Chancellor for a short duration, and the Institution of Engineers (India), where he remained for two years as its President, the Jadavpur University and the Alumni Association of the National Council of Education, Bengal remained his first love. The Lecture Series being organized by the National Council of Education, Bengal, is a testimony to the imprints Dr. Sen left due to his close association with its affairs and the contributions he made for the furtherance of its objectives.

The prestigious national honour of 'Padma Bhushan' was conferred on Dr. Triguna Sen in 1965 and recognizing his immense talent and very admirable intellectual capabilities, the country's political leadership inducted him into the Union Cabinet in 1967 with the vital portfolio of Education. During his tenure as the Education Minister, Dr. Sen was instrumental in enunciating the National Education Policy of 1968 which was formulated on the basis of the Report of the Kothari Commission on Education, of which Dr. Sen himself was a member. He looked upon education as an investment in national development and believed that properly organized education had the power

* Dr. Triguna Sen Memorial lecture on *Importance of value-based politics*, Kolkata (15 March 2009).

to ensure national development and also achieve the much needed secular polity and national integration. Later, during 1969-71, as the Union Minister in-charge of Petroleum, Chemicals and Minerals, Dr. Sen got the stringent drug prices control order issued, thereby, fixing the minimum prices of essential drugs to the benefit of the people in need. In the area of Petroleum, as the Minister in-charge, he remained a motivational force behind accelerating the pace of oil exploration process so as to reduce the deficit in crude oil in the country. Dr. Sen proved to be an accomplished parliamentarian and a very persuasive speaker during his tenure as the member of the Rajya Sabha from 1967 to 1974. His transparent image and the enviable ability to ingeniously handle even the most complex issues made him endearing to one and all. More than anything else, Dr. Triguna Sen was a firm believer in ethical values in public life. As a tribute to his memory, I have today chosen to speak on the 'Importance of Value-Based Politics', a subject of seminal importance in the present context.

Politics in a broader sense is public life, which impacts the lives of all, more so the lives of millions of the common people as it involves the process of decision making directly affecting the society, for its good or otherwise. As such, it should be undeniable that the exercise of political authority, be it in the Government or outside it, should be based on ethical considerations and moral values as it has an overriding influence on the society as a whole.

'Ethics' is the science of morals in human conduct and the expression, 'ethical' means what is morally correct and honourable. 'Moral' is defined as what is concerned with goodness or badness of human character or behaviour, which makes a distinction between what is right and what is wrong. By moral behaviour, we consider behaviour that conforms to accepted standard of general conduct, which is based on rules and standards of human behaviour. It is essential that politics is governed by moral behaviour, which is an essential part of ethical and value-based conduct. Thus, morality in public life will signify the degree of conformity of an idea or practice to well established ethical principles and from that point of view, good governance must be based on moral virtue, which will ensure justice to people and the country at large according to ethical standards. Thus, value-based politics postulates a political system which functions on the basis of high ethical standard, based on exemplary moral behaviour.

Mahatma Gandhi said very emphatically, that it is inconceivable to view politics detached from ethics. In other words, ethical considerations are the most important aspect of human behaviour and, as such, is and should be central to politics. We cannot think of politics dehors discipline which determines how individuals having different, even conflicting interests must co-exist peacefully in an organized society, the State.

Lenin, one of the greatest revolutionaries of modern times, said prophetically, that if politics determines our destiny, then we must determine what our politics should be. As politics decides our future, it should be based on a value-system, which will be central to it, and, therefore, if politics is unconcerned with just, ethical, moral and fair principles, not only politics but the entire value system which influences the peoples' actions and concerns will be vitiated. Thus, I feel, is the importance of the theme of today's Lecture: *'Importance of Value-Based Politics'*. I believe, there are no two views on the imperative of values in politics and the question is how much is practised in public life by those who deal with or expect to deal with the affairs of the nation, that is of the people.

The Constitution of India, a product of the sagacity, vision and the collective wisdom of a whole generation of our nation's leadership, is an embodiment of the values that we as a nation deeply cherish. Those who hold public office take an oath to uphold the Constitution, which is based on a value system in itself. It is, indeed, a codification of our fundamental objectives and methodology as perceived by men and women endowed with a broad and inclusive national vision and enriched by the experiences of various countries, which had striven before us to establish a just society, respecting individual freedom and assuring the basic needs of a dignified existence. A commitment to fundamental democratic values is central to it. Those who provided leadership to the country in the early years of the Republic were acutely conscious of the need to conduct themselves and the affairs of the country in a manner reinforcing respect for the ethical values among our people and in public affairs and conduct. In many ways, the survival of Indian democracy, against many adversities, can be attributed to the quality of leadership that our country was fortunate to have in those critical years.

However, unfortunately, over the years, it appears that growing sections, representing practically all walks of life, particularly the political class and most worrisomely, even some in the judiciary and the media have begun to think that values and principles are dispensable attributes and that only assumption of power or authority or quick money, is what counts. Politics is no longer seen as a noble vocation in the service of the people, but it is all about the "art of the possible", which signifies that neither the means nor the end matters. No society can insulate itself from the consequences of such politics for far too long. All major maladies our society is afflicted with today, have their roots in my view, in the politics devoid of values, of which the political community seems unmindful as of any importance: to them it is the end that matters and not the means, although it preaches otherwise for public consumption.

The ever-widening gap between precepts and practices and private and public morality has greatly contributed to the erosion of values, polluting the public functionaries in our country.

Politics reflects on the essential characteristics of the larger society itself. They both impinge upon each other in diverse ways. The logic that politics is independent from society and operates on a separate set of rules is something that unrealistic critics who do not want to play or recognize any pro-active role in restoring politics into the framework of an acceptable value system would want us to believe. We have endless number of critics, but not many who want to intervene pro-actively to correct the aberrations. Everyone seems to think that it is sufficient to point out the defects in the systems and be a critic only and it is someone else's responsibility to bring about the changes.

Analysing the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire, the great thinker, Gibbon once said: "When the people of Rome wanted not to give to society, but for society to give them, when the freedom they wished foremost was the freedom from responsibility, then it was that Rome ceased to be free".

If growing sections of our society are beginning to question the efficacy of our political system and are becoming increasingly cynical about the political class as a whole and are perceiving threat to their freedom, then all must ask themselves, 'where are we heading to as a society?' In fact, cynics have often described politics in India as unpredictable because it is apparently devoid of any firm ethical or moral basis. Needless to say, it is an unacceptable situation, which must be changed by our collective will.

Recently, we conducted two Round Table meetings under the auspices of the Lok Sabha, involving many eminent men and women from various walks of life to deliberate upon what ails our public life and the ways and means to strengthen our parliamentary democracy. The deliberations at the meetings were, indeed, an eye opener. There was a large measure of consensus among the participants on the credibility gap of our leadership. They were also of the view that the present-day leaders do not inspire confidence in the nation because of their apparent unconcern about ethical conduct or means in the discharge of their public function.

Traditionally, our people used to look up to our leaders for inspiration and guidance, a legacy we inherited from our freedom struggle, led by Mahatma Gandhi. Those days, leaders lived by the ideals they preached to others, and that was why our freedom struggle remained value-based influencing the people as a whole. People had genuine respect for the leaders and they had a profound faith in their values and commitment to the national causes. Unfortunately, not many among today's generation of leaders can

inspire people. Dr. Triguna Sen had also realized this during his stint as the Union Minister as he commented sadly: 'I understand why young men of today have lost faith in us. I realize why they are angry with us, the selfish, corrupt elders'.

The downward trend is visible at every level from the village *panchayat* to the national Parliament and other constitutional bodies even. We must have leadership at every level, particularly at the grass-root level, committed to value-based policies, which should be sincerely implemented. If our actions are devoid of moral conduct, then they will be necessarily anti-people.

Unfortunately, today we have a fractured polity in the country which is almost totally governed by politics of confrontation, if not hatred of each other. Today, the country is overtaken by intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, violence, conflict and disrespect for democratic dissent, which are seriously vitiating our political life, as well as social cohesion. Such confrontational politics has made caste, creed, language, region and religion divisive issues, seeking to mould public opinion around them and sections of our political spectrum is depending on the same to get political advantage by emphasizing on what divides the people than what unites them. Leadership based on such dangerously divisive factors seems to be oblivious of our most cherished national values such as secularism, socialism, respect for pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance and co-existence. What is even more worrisome is the fact that political polarization is sought in the name of sub-national, narrow and divisive identities, whose preferred language is often that of taking recourse to violence rather than the democratic and civilized methods of discussion and dialogue. Several recent incidents in our country have exhibited politicians and even so-called cultural organizations taking recourse to violent and unethical means, which essentially depended on crime and rabid anti-social elements.

Criminals are being used to settle political scores and in the process criminals are crossing the border and entering politics. This had led to criminalization of politics or rather what I call as politicization of crime. The violent behaviour we see in our legislative bodies at every level is the result of not only the entry of people with questionable background into politics, but sections of political leadership taking recourse to questionable ends, which they believe will help them politically whatever may be the effect on the people generally. It is, therefore, imperative to stress that parliamentary democracy cannot be strengthened, unless and until those who indulge in behaviour incompatible with established traditions of democracy or who, without real faith in healthy democratic methods, deliberately take recourse to unethical means, are made to account for their wrong-doing. The only way to make them accountable is by separating them from the democratic

institutions they have come to be associated with, sometimes through questionable means.

It is from this perspective that there is an urgent need to address the issues of corruption, criminalisation and communalisation of politics, and the vicious role played by money power and muscle power in our political and public life. Criminalisation of politics or non-adherence to well-established democratic means not only pollutes the political environment but also affects smooth and orderly functioning of our democratic institutions, whose one primary function is to highlight people's grievances and expectations and to draw the attention of the Government to people's reaction to policies and programmes. In this context, demands have been made time and again from various quarters seeking enactment of effective laws and strengthening the existing ones to firmly deal with the menace posed by the vitiating elements in our public life. Facing these issues squarely is one of the most urgent tasks before the nation.

Today the nation is desperately groping for leaders with integrity and a national vision in our Parliament, the highest forum of democratic debate and civilized behaviour. The practice of rushing to the well, shouting slogans, flouting rules, creation of uproarious scenes warranting frequent adjournments of the House, the open and deliberate disregard of the Chair and several other infirmities we regularly witness in our Parliament and the State Legislatures are all unfailing symptoms of the relentless erosion of values in our public life.

One most unfortunate trend, which has emerged in recent times, is that Parliament, the lofty temple of our democracy, has come to be the playground for acute confrontational and competitive politics. The floor of the House has a great sanctity as a forum where the Government is made to listen to the demands and aspirations of the people, who are the real masters in a democracy. That sanctity is grievously violated when members behave in a manner which invites public opprobrium.

Often, members force adjournment of the House disrupting the business, including the important Question Hour which has got a special sanctity as it gives opportunity to the elected representatives of the people to make the Government answerable for all its omissions and commissions. The methodology adopted is to force the Chair to suspend it due to slogan shouting by sections of members who dc not allow the business of the House to be transacted peacefully or at all which only helps the Ministers, who are not required to answer the questions and to face supplementaries. It leads to a criminal wastage of huge public money as a sitting of Parliament or the State Legislature incurs a considerable amount of public money, to the extent of nearly Rs. 29,000 per minute. Unfortunately, today, the narrow partisan

interests of our political parties and public interest are seen as synonymous by sections of the political class.

This unfortunate state of affairs is getting encouragement to a considerable extent due to the response of the Media, which tends to focus on disturbances and forced adjournments rather than on the constructive discussions in the House.

The malady of money power has become so deep-rooted that it has even begun to intervene directly with the functioning of our core democratic institutions. It was not long ago that we had to reckon with members who were caught in the act of receiving money for raising questions in the House, to serve vested interests, an act which struck at the very foundation of our democratic practices. The sanctity of Parliament is desecrated in the process. The cash for queries scandal, leading to the expulsion of certain members involved in the act, has, no doubt, shaken the confidence of the nation in our public life. The corrective and punitive action that followed was intended to restore people's faith in our democratic institutions. It was encouraging that most political parties and a vast majority of MPs supported the very harsh punishment to all those found guilty of such gross misdemeanour. The expulsion of 10 members of Parliament in 2005 for the 'cash for query scam' was a watershed event in our parliamentary history; nowhere have so many elected legislators in a national Parliament been expelled for a misdemeanour by a vote of the House. The three-month suspension of four members of the Lok Sabha in 2006 for their role in irregularities related to MPLADS funds and the suspension of a member for thirty sittings of the House in 2007 for his misconduct and contempt of the Committee as well as the House, demonstrated the resolve of the House to cleanse itself and to lay down new standards of conduct for its members. These measures won the people's resounding approval. It is of crucial importance that this process of self-cleansing must continue till our system is insulated completely from such perilous scourges. But, even before the nation recovered from this shock came another deadly blow to the dignity and decorum of Parliament when, some members waved wads of currency notes on the floor of the House alleging pecuniary inducements for voting in the House. This was the day when values hit the nadir, the rock bottom in our public life, and undoubtedly the saddest day for every conscientious citizen. It is time the people should insist on the legislators' strict adherence to norms of civilized behaviour so that we can seek to regain people's respect for our democratic institutions.

There is today, no doubt, an all-pervading need to infuse various areas of our national life with moral values, and in this process, politics should come first. But, it is, by no means, the only area with which we should be concerned. It has affected almost all avocations unfortunately, including,

if I may say so, a considerably large section of the business community and even a section of the judiciary is also under cloud today.

Today, big business houses seem to be able to influence politics, sometimes even through questionable means. It may be an international phenomenon and may not be peculiar to any country but that can be no excuse for us, who belong to a country which face problems of extreme poverty and backwardness. The people have to be determined to insist on probity in public life—be it politics or business or any other activity concerning the people. People often blame the Government for the sorry state of affairs in our public life but they do not introspect themselves. Shirking of responsibility in itself is a reflection of the erosion of values in the society.

What is the option available to the electorate if their representative is not functioning to their satisfaction? If our elected representative is proving to be corrupt, irresponsible, inefficient or indifferent towards people's causes, the citizens today are left with no choice other than to wait till the next elections. This brings us to the question of how to express our disapproval of the erosion of values in politics. I am one who strongly believes that it is high time we thought of incorporating the concept of Right to Recall in our Constitution.

As is known, in the present Lok Sabha, certain members have been disqualified from the House for raising questions on the floor of the august House for pecuniary considerations. The voters who elected those members were powerless to take any effective action. It was the House, which took the bold step. If only the electors have the right to question and hold their representatives accountable for their acts of omissions and commissions without having to wait till the next elections, our public life would, perhaps, become better. The public must be empowered to initiate action when situation so demands. This is a question the nation must debate seriously.

For the last several decades, no single party nationally has been able to get a majority of its own and the result has been that both in the Centre and in the States, Governments have been formed on occasions by political parties with disparate programmes and ideologies, who combine only with the object of acquiring power, forming unprincipled coalitions and even by encouraging defections from one party to another. There have been recently many more instances of post-poll understanding or adjustments than before between different political parties, only for the purpose of formation of a Government. The instability of such governments and adoption of questionable methods to remain in power, often compromising on the basic political and constitutional morality, have seriously eroded people's faith in the system. The public perception of the extent of political immorality practised in the

country can be gauged from the observations of Prof. Andre Beteille, the distinguished sociologist, when he states:

> "There is growing suspicion today that (even) legislation is sometimes enacted not in the public interest but in order to accommodate a particular faction, a particular community or, in the extreme case, even a particular political leader. The leader will, of course, have cleared his ground in advance by softening up power brokers of various political persuasions."

Value-based politics, centred around well-defined policies and priorities, has become a casualty leading to vitiating the political atmosphere and uncertainties in the governance structure. Often allegations of horse-trading are made of which we have seen recently a most sordid example. Unfortunately, the spectacle of *aya rams* and *gaya rams* still remains the bane of our political system.

Today almost, every issue, from those concerning core national values to issues of development, is subjected to the grind of contentious politics. It is essential that the political parties and others associated with the governance process and the developmental activities grow above partisan politics and demonstrate the willingness as also the sincerity to draw up and implement schemes with well-chosen priorities and devise new national approach in the larger interest of the people. Issues of development, in which the common people have the greatest stake, cannot be subjected to political muscle-flexing without caring for their destructive effect on the people. Matters of vital national interest should not be made a casualty of partisan, recriminatory and destructive politics.

We are going through a phase when the resilience and adaptability of our democratic institutions are stretched too far. The people had great expectations from a free India. But in many ways, their hopes and expectations have been belied by the opportunistic and wayward ways of those associated with politics and governance in the country. To quote Prof. Beteille again: "...The people of India have gradually learnt that their own elected leaders can be as deaf to their pleas as the ones who came from outside (the British). Sometimes they have shown themselves to be even more venal and self-serving than the British who ruled India".

A time has come, therefore, when all sections of the people have to consider very seriously how a country like ours, with its great heritage and civilisation, with the magnificent history of its freedom struggle and also with the great talent of the young people, with constructive efforts of the working class, including farmers, peasants and common people, should come out of the present infirmities in the system, so that the country as a whole can achieve all round development at a faster pace.

Politics and politicians cannot be expected to earn respectability, unless politics is firmly wedded to some basic values and some fundamental principles. This can come about only with the firm resolve of the nation. The nation as a whole must be united in this struggle to bring values to the centre stage of our public life. Today, what we need is a movement across this vast nation to build up public opinion against many of the maladies that afflict our politics contributing to public apathy towards politics and democratic processes as such. This can be meaningfully achieved only if committed and conscientious people, particularly the youth, come into the arena of politics and clean the system from within. The price we pay for political indifference is bad governance, which affects almost every aspect of our life. We cannot expect to get good governance from bad politics. Therefore, making politics ethically sound is one of the most pressing needs of our times.

The various aberrations in our political functioning are matters that should worry all responsible and sensitive citizens. More than on anything else, we need to agree on the need and the fundamentals of value-based politics. As Prof. Beteille has observed very pertinently, "In a parliamentary democracy, the obligations of constitutional morality are expected to be equally binding on the government and the opposition. In India, the same political party treats these obligations very differently when it is in office and when it is out of it. This has contributed greatly to the popular perception of our political system as being amoral".

The Ruling and the Opposition Parties in Parliament and in the State Legislatures should see themselves as partners in the consolidation of the democratic process. All our democratic institutions need to demonstrate a greater degree of sensitivity and responsiveness to the growing disenchantment and apathy among our people with different aspects of our national life, particularly our political life. Divisive and communal politics will have to give way to a broad-based national political agenda. Consensus, not confrontation, has to be the basic philosophy of our political engagement.

West Bengal can take the lead in this matter. It is a State, which has produced great thinkers, intellectuals, social reformers and leaders of the stature of Raja Rammohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and others, whose imprints on our national life are enormous. They were all true national leaders endowed with a broad and inclusive vision and committed to the finest values in their public and private lives.

No organisation or society can progress unless and until leaders set and follow highest standards and norms of behaviour. The citizens and those in public life must not make any compromise so far as public behaviour is concerned—which should be impeccable, which alone can instill confidence

in the people at large in the efficacy of democracy and the political processes associated with it. For each one of us, remaining fully committed to the values in life would be the most fitting tribute to the memory of Dr. Triguna Sen.

I wish the National Council of Education, Bengal, all the very best in their endeavours towards providing quality education to students and inculcating among them the high values cherished by Dr. Triguna Sen. I thank the organizers of this Lecture for the opportunity given to me to share with you some of my perspectives on this very absorbing theme: 'Importance of Value-Based Politics' that today engrosses every sensible citizen who is mindful of the direction the present day politics is taking.

Thank you.

IMPORTANCE OF VALUE-BASED POLITICS*

I feel greatly honoured to have been invited to deliver this Lecture in memory of the legal luminary Late Shri C.K. Daphtary. I am grateful to the Inns of Court (India) Society and the British Council for giving me an opportunity to pay my respectful homage to his memory.

Shri C.K. Daphtary was one of the most outstanding lawyers of his times. His encyclopaedic knowledge of law and remarkable art of persuasion in the presentation of cases before the judges made him a legal professional *par excellence*. His competence of creatively applying the principles of jurisprudence to the legal cases firmly established him as one among the country's brightest legal minds. His brilliant professional record and reputation made him the First Solicitor-General of India in 1951 and subsequently the Attorney General of India in 1963. In recognition of his passion, commitment and dedication to the legal profession, he was nominated by the President as a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1972. He lent dignity and distinction to all the offices he held. A man of high learning and outstanding eloquence, Shri Daphtary is remembered for the contribution he made to the debates of the Rajya Sabha which always bore the stamp of his great erudition and intellectual attainments. Whenever he spoke in the House, he was listened to by all sections with full attention. For his distinguished services to the nation, he was conferred *'Padma Vibhushan'* in 1968.

A man of singular affability, ready wit and innate charm, Shri Daphtary was extremely popular among all sections of the people. It has been more than twenty five years since we lost him in 1983, but his contributions have made him immortal and he will be remembered forever by the people of this country.

Shri Daphtary's transparent image and remarkable ability to ingeniously handle even the most complex issues endeared him to one and all. More than anything else, Shri Daphtary was a firm believer in ethical values in public life. As a tribute to his memory, I have today chosen to speak on the 'Importance of Value-based Politics', a subject of seminal importance in the present context.

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* At the C.K. Daphtary Memorial Lecture on *The Importance of Value-based Politics*, British Council, New Delhi (24 April 2009).

Politics in a broader sense is public life, which impacts the lives of all, more so the lives of millions of the common people as it involves the processes of decision making directly affecting the society, for its good or otherwise. As such, it is undeniable that the exercise of political authority, in the Government or outside it, be based on ethical considerations and moral values as it has an overriding influence on society as a whole.

'Ethics' is the science of morals in human conduct and the expression, 'ethical' means what is morally correct and honourable. 'Moral' is defined as what is concerned with goodness or otherwise of human character or behaviour, which makes a distinction between what is right and what is wrong. By moral behaviour, we consider behaviour that conforms to accepted standards of general conduct, which are based on rules and standards of human behaviour. It is essential that politics is governed by moral behaviour, which is an essential part of ethical and value-based conduct. Thus, morality in public life will signify the degree of conformity of an idea or practice to well-established ethical principles and from that point of view, good governance must be based on moral virtue, which will ensure justice to the people and the country at large according to ethical standards. Thus, value-based politics postulates a political system which functions on the basis of high ethical standards, based on exemplary moral behaviour.

Mahatma Gandhi said very emphatically, that it is inconceivable to view politics detached from ethics. In other words, ethical considerations are the most important aspects of human behaviour and, as such, are, and should be, central to politics. We cannot think of politics *dehors* principled behaviour and discipline which determine how individuals having different, even conflicting, interests must co-exist peacefully in an organized society, the State.

Lenin, one of the greatest revolutionaries of modern times, said prophetically, that if politics determines our destiny, then we must determine what our politics should be. As politics decides our future, it should be based on a value-system, which will be central to it, and, therefore, if politics is unconcerned with just, ethical, moral and fair principles, not only politics but also the entire value system which influences peoples' actions and concerns will be vitiated. This, I feel, is the importance of the theme of today's talk: 'Importance of Value-based Politics'. I believe, there are no two views on the imperative of values in politics and the question is how much is practised in public life by those who deal with or expect to deal with the affairs of the nation, and of the people.

The Constitution of India, a product of the sagacity, vision and the collective wisdom of a whole generation of our nation's leadership, is an embodiment of the values that we as a nation deeply cherish. Those who

hold public office take an oath to uphold the Constitution, which is based on a value system in itself and has to face the test of time. Speaking on the 44th Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Rajya Sabha, Shri Daphtary had also voiced similar views when he had stated that 'I for one, Sir, have regarded the Constitution not only as sacred but as something which has stood the trials of time very well'.

Our Constitution is, indeed, a codification of our fundamental objectives and methodology as perceived by men and women endowed with a broad and inclusive national vision and enriched by the experiences of various countries, which had striven before us to establish a just society, respecting individual freedoms and assuring the basic needs of a dignified existence. A commitment to fundamental democratic values is central to it. Those who provided leadership to the country in the early years of the Republic were acutely conscious of the need to conduct themselves and the affairs of the country in a manner reinforcing respect for the ethical values among our people, and in public affairs and conduct. In many ways, the survival of Indian democracy, against many adversities, can be attributed to the quality of leadership that our country was fortunate to have in those critical years. Despite having spent years as Solicitor General and Attorney General, Shri Daphtary was fearless when it came to speaking on issues that he felt strongly about. He had taken a bold stand against the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Rajya Sabha and had 'protested vigorously' against its anti-people provisions.

However, unfortunately, over the years, it appears that growing sections, representing practically all walks of life, particularly the political class, and most worrisomely, even some in the Judiciary and the media, have begun to think that values and principles are dispensable attributes and that only assumption of power or authority or quick money, is what counts. Politics is no longer seen as a noble vocation in the service of the people, but it is all about the "art of the possible", which signifies that neither the means nor the end matters. No society can insulate itself from the consequences of such politics for far too long. All major maladies our society is afflicted with today, have their roots, in my view, in the conduct and politics devoid of values, of which the political community seems unmindful: to them it is the end that matters and not the means, although it preaches otherwise for public consumption. The ever-widening gap between precepts and practices and private and public morality has greatly contributed to the erosion of values, polluting the public functionaries in our country.

Politics reflects on the essential characteristics of the larger society itself. They both impinge upon each other in diverse ways. The logic that politics is independent from society and operates on a separate set of rules is

something that unrealistic critics who do not want to play or recognize any proactive role in restoring politics into the framework of an acceptable value system would want us to believe. We have endless number of critics, but not many who want to intervene to correct the aberrations. Everyone seems to think that it is sufficient to point out the defects in the system and be a critic only, and it is someone else's responsibility to bring about the changes.

One is reminded of the forceful stand taken by Shri Daphtary on the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Bill, 1976 which aimed at putting severe restrictions on the freedom of the Press. Emphasizing the role of the Press as the fourth pillar of democracy, he observed:

> (This) Bill is not calculated to further democratic principles. We have heard so much in the past six months about things being done, things being said in order to save democracy that I am surprised that a Bill should be brought forward now which has the contrary effect. ... the freedom of the Press is vital, is vital to the growth of democracy, is vital to the progress of the country and it is vital that every one should have the right to free speech subject only to the restrictions of libel, etc. which right will not be hampered by an executive authority sitting over their heads all the time and they should be free to express their opinions. The only effect of this Bill will be that there will be no opinion expressed against the Government or against any of its measures. That ... is a policy of timidity, which I am unable to understand. Surely, the more democracy is on the rise, the more welcome it should be.

Analysing the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire, the great thinker Gibbon once said:

> When the people of Rome wanted not to give to society, but for society to give them, when the freedom they wished foremost was the freedom from responsibility, then it was that Rome ceased to be free.

If growing sections of our society are beginning to question the efficacy of our political system and are becoming increasingly cynical about the political class as a whole and are perceiving threat to their freedom, then all must ask themselves, 'where are we heading to as a society?' In fact, cynics have often described politics in India as unpredictable because it is apparently devoid of any firm ethical or moral basis. Needless to say, it is an unacceptable situation, which must be changed by our collective will.

Last year, we conducted two Round Table Discussions under the auspices of the Lok Sabha, involving many eminent men and women from various walks of life to deliberate upon what ails our public life and the ways and

means to strengthen our parliamentary democracy. The deliberations at the meetings were, indeed, an eye-opener. There was a large measure of consensus among the participants on the credibility gap of our leadership. They were also of the view that the present-day leaders do not inspire confidence in the nation because of their apparent unconcern about ethical conduct or means in the discharge of their public function.

Traditionally, our people used to look up to our leaders for inspiration and guidance, a legacy we inherited from our freedom struggle, led by Mahatma Gandhi. Those days, leaders lived by the ideals they preached to others, and that was why our freedom struggle remained value-based influencing the people as a whole. People had genuine respect for the leaders and they had a profound faith in their values and commitment to the national causes. Unfortunately, not many among today's generation of leaders can claim that they can inspire people.

The downward trend is visible at every level from the village *Panchayat* to the national Parliament and even other constitutional bodies. We must have leadership at every level, particularly at the grass-root level, committed to value-based policies, which should be sincerely implemented. If our actions are devoid of moral conduct, then they will be necessarily anti-people.

Unfortunately, today we have a fractured polity in the country which is almost totally governed by politics of confrontation, if not hatred of each other. Today, the country is overtaken by intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, violence, conflict and disrespect for democratic dissent, which are seriously vitiating our political life, as well as social cohesion. Such confrontational politics has made caste, creed, language, region and religion divisive issues, seeking to mould public opinion around them and sections of our political spectrum is depending on the same to get political advantage by emphasizing on what divides the people than what unites them. Leadership based on such dangerously divisive factors seems to be oblivious of our most cherished national values such as secularism, socialism, respect for pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance and co-existence. What is even more worrisome is the fact that political polarization is sought in the name of sub-national, narrow and divisive identities, whose preferred language is often that of taking recourse to violence rather than the democratic and civilized methods of discussion and dialogue. Several recent incidents in our country have exhibited politicians and even so-called cultural organizations taking recourse to violent and unethical means, which essentially depended on crime and rabid anti-social elements.

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criminalization of politics or rather what I call as politicization of crime. The violent behaviour we see in our legislative bodies at every level is the result of not only the entry of people with questionable background into politics, but sections of political leadership taking recourse to questionable means, which they believe will help them politically whatever may be the effect on the people generally. It is, therefore, imperative to stress that parliamentary democracy cannot be strengthened, unless and until those who indulge in behaviour incompatible with established traditions of democracy or who, without real faith in healthy democratic methods, deliberately take recourse to unethical means, are brought to book for their wrong-doings. The only way to make them accountable is by separating them from the democratic institutions they have come to be associated with, sometimes through questionable means.

It is from this perspective that there is an urgent need to address the issues of corruption, criminalisation and communalisation of politics, and the vicious role played by money power and muscle power in our political and public life. Criminalisation of politics or non-adherence to well-established democratic means, not only pollutes the political environment but also affects the smooth and orderly functioning of our democratic institutions, the one primary function which is to highlight people's grievances and expectations and to draw the attention of the Government to people's reaction to policies and programmes. In this context, demands have been made time and again from various quarters seeking enactment of effective laws and strengthening the existing ones to firmly deal with the menace posed by the vitiating elements in our public life. Facing these issues squarely and boldly is one of the most urgent tasks before the nation.

Today the nation is desperately looking and searching for leaders with integrity and a national vision in our Parliament, the highest forum of democratic debate and civilized behaviour. The practice of rushing to the well, shouting slogans, flouting rules, creation of uproarious scenes warranting frequent adjournments of the House, the open and deliberate disregard of the Chair and several other maladies we have regularly witnessed in our Parliament and the State Legislatures are all unfailing symptoms of the relentless erosion of values in our public life.

One most unfortunate trend which has emerged in recent times is that Parliament, the lofty temple of our democracy, has come to be the playground for extreme confrontational and competitive politics. The Floor of the House has a great sanctity as the forum where the Government is made to address the demands and aspirations of the people, who are the real masters in a democracy. That sanctity is grievously violated when members behave in a manner which invites public opprobrium.

Often, members force adjournment of the House by disrupting the listed business, including the Question Hour which has got a special place in our parliamentary system, giving as it does an opportunity to the elected representatives of the people to make the Government answerable for all its omissions and commissions. The methodology adopted is to force the Chair to suspend the proceedings by slogan shouting by sections of members who do not allow the business of the House to be transacted peacefully or at all which only helps the Ministers, who are not required to answer the questions and to face the supplementaries. It leads to a criminal wastage of huge public money as a sitting of Parliament or the State Legislature incurs a considerable amount of money, to the extent of nearly Rs. 29,000 per minute. Unfortunately, today, the narrow partisan interests of our political parties and public interest are seen as synonymous by sections of the political class.

This unfortunate state of affairs is getting encouragement to a considerable extent due to the response of the Media, which tends to focus on disturbances and forced adjournments rather than on the constructive discussions in the House.

The malady of money power has become so deep rooted that it has even begun to intervene directly with the functioning of our core democratic institutions. It was not long ago that we had to reckon with members who were caught in the act of receiving money for raising questions in the House, to serve vested interests, an act which struck at the very foundation of our democratic practices. The sanctity of Parliament was desecrated in the process. The 'cash for queries' scandal, leading to the expulsion of certain members involved in the act, has, no doubt, shaken the confidence of the nation in our public life. The corrective and punitive action that followed was intended to restore people's faith in our democratic institutions. It was encouraging that most political parties and a vast majority of MPs supported the very harsh punishment to all those found guilty of such gross misdemeanour. The expulsion of 10 members of Parliament in 2005 for the 'cash for query' scam was a watershed event in our parliamentary history; nowhere have so many elected legislators in a national Parliament been expelled for a misdemeanour by a vote of the House. The three-month suspension of four members of the Lok Sabha in 2006 for their role in irregularities related to the MPLADS funds and the suspension of a member for thirty sittings of the House in 2007 for his misconduct and contempt of the Committee as well as the House, demonstrated the resolve of the House to cleanse itself and to lay down new standards of conduct for its members. It was heartening to me personally that these measures won the people's resounding approval. It is of crucial importance that this process of self-cleansing must continue till our system is insulated completely from such perilous scourges. But, even before the nation recovered from this shock came another deadly blow to the dignity

and decorum of Parliament when some members waved wads of currency notes on the Floor of the House alleging pecuniary inducements for voting in the House. This was the day when values hit the nadir, the rock bottom in our public life, and undoubtedly the saddest day for every conscientious citizen. It is time the people should insist on the legislators' strict adherence to norms of civilized behaviour so that we can seek to regain people's respect for and trust in our democratic institutions.

There is today, no doubt, an all-pervading need to infuse various areas of our national life with moral values, and in this process, politics should come first. But, it is, by no means the only area with which we should be concerned. It has affected almost all avocations unfortunately, including, if I may say so, a considerably large section of the business community and even a section of the Judiciary is also under cloud today.

The people have to be determined to insist on probity in public life—be it politics or business or any other activity concerning the people. People often blame the Government for the sorry state of affairs in our public life but they do not introspect themselves. Shirking of responsibility in itself is a reflection of the erosion of values in society.

What is the option available to the electorate if their representative is not functioning to their satisfaction? If our elected representative is proving to be corrupt, irresponsible, inefficient or indifferent towards people's causes, the citizens are left with no choice other than to wait till the next elections. This brings us to the question of how to express our disapproval of the erosion of values in politics. I am one who strongly believes that it is high time we thought of incorporating the concept of Right to Recall in our Constitution. If only the electors have the right to question and hold their representatives accountable for their acts of omission and commission without having to wait till the next elections, our public life would, perhaps, become better. The public must be empowered to initiate action when the situation so demands. This is a question the nation must debate seriously.

For the last several decades, no single party nationally has been able to get a majority of its own and the result has been that both in the Centre and in the States, Governments have been formed on occasions by political parties with disparate programmes and ideologies, who combine only with the object of acquiring power, forming unprincipled coalitions and even by encouraging defections from one party to another. There have been recently many more instances of post-poll understandings or adjustments than before between different political parties, only for the purpose of formation of a Government. The instability of such Governments and adoption of questionable methods to remain in power, often compromising on the basic political and constitutional morality, have seriously eroded people's faith in the system.

The public perception of the extent of political immorality practised in the country can be gauged from the observations of Prof. Andre Beteille, the distinguished sociologist, when he states:

> There is growing suspicion today that (even) legislation is sometimes enacted not in the public interest but in order to accommodate a particular fraction, a particular community or, in the extreme case, even a particular political leader. The leader will, of course, have cleared his ground in advance by softening up power brokers of various political persuasions.

Value-based politics, centered around well-defined policies and priorities, has become a casualty, leading to vitiating the political atmosphere and uncertainties in the governance structure. Often, allegations of horse-trading are made of which we have seen recently a most sordid example. Unfortunately, the spectacle of *aya ramis* and *gaya ramis* still remains the bane of our political system.

Today, almost every issue, from those concerning core national values to issues of development, is subjected to the grind of contentious politics. It is essential that the political parties and others associated with the governance process and the developmental activities grow above partisan politics and demonstrate the willingness as also the sincerity to draw up and implement schemes with well-chosen priorities and devise a new national approach in the larger interest of the people. Issues of development, in which the common people have the greatest stake, cannot be subjected to political muscle-flexing without caring for their destructive effect on the people. Matters of vital national interest should not be made a casualty of partisan, recriminatory and destructive politics.

We are going through a phase when the resilience and adaptability of our democratic institutions are stretched too far. The people had great expectations from a free India. But in many ways, their hopes and expectations have been belied by the opportunistic and wayward ways of those associated with politics and governance in the country.

A time has come, therefore, when all sections of the people have to consider very seriously how a country like ours, with its great heritage and civilisation, with the magnificent history of its freedom struggle and also with the great talent of the young people, with constructive efforts of the working class, including farmers, peasants and common people, should come out of the present infirmities in the system, so that the country as a whole can achieve all round development at a faster pace.

Politics and politicians cannot be expected to earn respectability, unless politics is firmly wedded to some basic values and some fundamental principles. This can come about only with the firm resolve of the nation. The nation as a whole must be united in this struggle to bring values to the centre stage of our public life. Today, what we need is a movement across this vast nation to build up public opinion against many of the maladies that afflict our politics contributing to public apathy towards politics and democratic processes as such. This can be meaningfully achieved only if committed and conscientious people, particularly the youth, come into the arena of politics and clean the system from within. I firmly believe that the community of lawyers can play a vital role in this regard by participating in the process of democratic consolidation. The price we pay for political indifference is bad governance, which affects almost every aspect of our life. We cannot expect to get good governance from bad politics. Therefore, making politics ethically sound is one of the most pressing needs of our times.

The various aberrations in our political functioning are matters that should worry all responsible and sensitive citizens. More than on anything else, we need to agree on the need and the fundamentals of value-based politics. As Prof. Beteille has observed very pertinently, "In a parliamentary democracy, the obligations of constitutional morality are expected to be equally binding on the Government and the opposition. In India, the same political party treats these obligations very differently when it is in office and when it is out of it. This has contributed greatly to the popular perception of our political system as being amoral."

The Ruling and the Opposition Parties in Parliament and in the State Legislatures should see themselves as partners in the consolidation of the democratic process. All our democratic institutions need to demonstrate a greater degree of sensitivity and responsiveness to the growing disenchantment and apathy among our people with different aspects of our national life, particularly our political life. Divisive and communal politics will have to give way to a broad-based national political agenda. Consensus, not confrontation, has to be the basic philosophy of our political engagement.

No organisation or society can progress unless and until leaders set and follow the highest standards and norms of behaviour. The citizens and those in public life must not make any compromise so far as public behaviour is concerned—which should be impeccable, which alone can instill confidence in the people at large in the efficacy of democracy and the political processes associated with it. For each one of us, remaining fully committed to the values in life would be the most fitting tribute to the memory of Shri C.K. Daphtary.

I wish the Inns of Court (India) Society and the British Council all the very best in their endeavours towards furtherance of the values and ideals of Shri Daphtary. I thank the organizers of this Lecture for the opportunity given to me to share with this distinguished gathering some of my perspectives on this very topically relevant theme: *Importance of Value-Based Politics*, that today engrosses every sensible citizen who is mindful of the direction present day politics is taking.

Thank you.

SIX DECADES OF DEMOCRACY—THE WAY FORWARD*

I am thankful to the Capital Foundation Society for its invitation to me to be the Chief Guest at their Annual Lecture this year and for the opportunity given to me to address this distinguished gathering this evening. I feel particularly humble that the invitation for me to associate with this function came from none other than Hon'ble Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, an outstanding jurist, and a great human being, who is the patron of this prestigious Society. I compliment the Capital Foundation Society for their endeavours in bringing men of learning together to articulate and mobilize public opinion, thereby playing an important role in providing inputs in the formulation of public policies and programmes. I also take this opportunity to compliment all those distinguished persons who have been felicitated and honoured this evening for their commendable services to our society in different ways.

As is known that the Capital Foundation Society, has been regularly organizing Lectures and public discussions on areas of topical relevance with a view to strengthen our democratic structure. The Society has been working creatively and with distinction for the people's cause in diverse areas and also for promoting democratic values. I recall that I had taken part in a Panel Discussion organized by the Capital Foundation Society on Electoral Reforms way back in 1989. I would like to thank the Society for giving me another opportunity today to share with you all some of my perspectives on the working of our democracy. Already into the seventh decade of freedom and democracy and keeping in mind that we are currently involved in yet another General Election, I have, today chosen to speak on 'Six Decades of Democracy—The Way Forward'.

Friends, sixty years is a long period in the course of any journey, particularly for a country which has ventured on to the path of democracy after centuries-long struggle for freedom. It is an appropriate occasion for us to take stock of the distance we have covered, recount the successes and the set-backs we have experienced, analyse the crises we have encountered and visualize the challenges that lie ahead in our continuing endeavour for democratic consolidation in the country, currently caught at the crossroads of history.

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* Annual Lecture on *Six Decades of Democracy—The Way Forward* at the Capital Foundation Society, New Delhi (30 April 2009).

There were quite a few people across the world who had expressed doubts about India's ability to run a democratic system at the time when we gained Independence. Many, including statesmen of established democracies, felt that the extremely poor economic conditions, low literacy, the hierarchical societal structure, the multiple ethnic, religious and linguistic cleavages, were all factors that could inhibit and curtail democratic practices in a new-born Republic.

But, our Founding Fathers had tremendous faith in the capability and commitment of the Indian masses to successfully run a democratic system. Once, when Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was confronted with the question, in the early years of freedom, 'After Nehru who?', his studied response was 'Three hundred and sixty million people'—that was the population of India then. And that was the kind of confidence our Founding Fathers had in our people to run a democratic system in our country. The rationale for democracy as Pandit Nehru put it was:

> 'We have definitely accepted the democratic process. ... Because we think that in the final analysis, it promotes the growth of human beings and of society; because ... we attach great value to individual spirit of man to grow.... We do want high standards of living, but not at the cost of man's creative spirit, his creative energy, his spirit of adventure... of all those fine things of life which have ennobled man throughout the ages. ...'

The fourteen General Elections that we went through and numerous elections to the State Assemblies were marked by peaceful changes in Government, which proves beyond doubt, our people's commitment and capability to successfully run a democratic system. They have taken to the path of parliamentary democracy with remarkable ease. The current exercise of electing the Fifteenth Lok Sabha is proof, yet again, of a billion plus people's commitment to democratic way of life and governance, in stark contrast to the dilution of democratic commitments in our own neighbourhood. Over the past six decades, our people have proven, time and again, that their political judgment cannot be taken for granted, that they are capable of weighing issues on merit, of assessing the performance of those in power against the ultimate yardstick of the impact that governance makes on their lives. They have been doing so by demonstrating exceptional prudence and uncanny wisdom in the exercise of their franchise. It is this quality that was reflected when they brought about changes in the Central Government of our country on 6 out of 14 occasions that we went through the General Elections.

This democratic consolidation, preserving and protecting the unity of such a heterogeneous country with one billion and more people, practising different religions, speaking innumerable languages, and home to a wide

variety of customs and practices, has indeed been a gigantic challenge that our people have largely met, to the envy of many. Our achievements look particularly impressive given the failure of many countries that secured freedom around the same period as we did, to secure even the most elementary concomitants of a democratic system.

The sustenance of a vibrant parliamentary democracy all these years, no doubt, has been one of our significant achievements in the last six decades of freedom. Through our parliamentary polity reinforced by a multi-party system and provisions for free and fair elections to representative bodies, accountability of the Executive, independence of the Judiciary, existence of a free and vigilant Fourth Estate and an ever watchful citizenry, we have provided an effective institutional framework for a successful democracy. As Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen observed: 'What India has achieved under democratic framework in the past over five decades is far more impressive and it overwhelms some of the shortcomings and failures'.

Into the seventh decade of freedom today, under the framework of democracy and a planned economy it provided, we have hopefully left behind the image of being a backward country and now we are acknowledged as a significant player in the global economy. Today, ours is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, even in the backdrops of the global meltdown, feeding the world's second largest population, remaining largely insulated from the extra-ordinary crises several leading economies are confronted with of late. Besides having a formidable industrial and military base, we have built up one of the world's largest pools of scientific and technological manpower. We have achieved all these despite the fact that in the past six decades, we have faced several critical situations, numerous challenges, insurgencies, waves of terrorism, proxy wars and external aggressions. In spite of myriad odds, our biggest achievement has been that the common man has retained faith in the democratic system.

During this period, we had also set out on the course to correct the gravely unjust hierarchical social order and to establish in its place a progressive and egalitarian society, thus offering hope to the millions who had been suffering for centuries, remaining on the fringes of a stifling and stratified social order. The removal of untouchability and treating everybody as equal before the law were revolutionary measures that we undertook to usher in a new era of equality and egalitarianism. The provisions of affirmative action and positive discriminations to empower the deprived and the weaker sections have changed the lives of millions of people for the better.

As is well known, the Parliament occupies a pivotal position in our system and the polity revolves around the institution of Parliament, which has come to symbolize the unity and integrity of the nation and the secular fabric of

society. It is through the institution of Parliament that the collective will and wisdom of the nation is expressed, and the hopes and aspirations, ambitions and expectations, even the fears and frustrations, of the people are brought to the attention of the authorities.

Despite many remarkable achievements, the aberrations in the system, as reflected in the criminalization of politics or politicization of crime, rampant corruption and nepotism, all leading to the decline of our representative institutions which once stood proudly as the lofty temples of democracy, have, of late, assumed alarming proportions. Today, the Parliament, which is central to our polity and a symbol of our national unity, is facing a severe crisis of credibility and confidence. As the Presiding Officer of the Lok Sabha and as a member associated with the House for almost four decades, I have to admit with great agony that there has been a gradual decline in the character and the effectiveness of Parliament as a collective forum and as the supreme representative institution.

After six decades of Independence, we have come to a stage when questions are being asked about the workability of our democratic set-up based on the parliamentary system and about the utility and relevance of our vital democratic institutions. Politics in the country at present most worrisomely carries with it an image of intrigue, disorder and divisive attitudes of which the people want a needed change. Because of the competitive and confrontational politics that has overtaken the country, the democratic institutions are not able to discharge their fundamental functions effectively. Debates and discussions, the hallmarks of democracy, have been over-shadowed by disruptions, non-cooperation, intolerance of each other and other non-democratic alternatives, which have made the great institution of Parliament itself a subject of ridicule, inviting public opprobrium. Some sections within the Parliament and the State Legislatures are viewing many of our well-conceived parliamentary procedures as dispensable luxuries for our system. Of late, impelled by intolerance and confrontationist instinct and the politics of negativism, legitimate and well-conceived parliamentary devices like the Question Hour are being seen as totally avoidable democratic extravaganzas and the space for orderly legislative conduct is being occupied by attention-seeking and irresponsible behaviour, discrediting the people's institution before the people themselves.

This, to my mind, is one of the most unfortunate aspects of the progression our democratic journey has achieved over the last sixty years. The complexion of the lofty temple of democracy and the highest forum of democratic debate, the Indian Parliament, has undergone a dramatic change over the last sixty years, unfortunately not for the better. The scenario in our State Legislatures, where situations warranting physical intervention of Marshals to restore order in the House, are becoming quite frequent, is far more regrettable.

The divisive politics in our country has contributed to reinforcing the religious, linguistic and casteist identities in society, thereby making the system a reflection of the existing social distortions, bereft of the essential national outlook. It is all the more worrisome that political power has got polarized around identities of caste, religion and language, seriously undermining the process of composite nation-building, as visualized during our struggle for freedom.

The political atmosphere in the country has got seriously vitiated, and the politics of intense confrontation, negativism and opposition at all costs is taking an upper hand, denying the much-needed space for collective and consensual approach towards major national issues. The proliferation of political parties and groups based on religion, region, etc. with limited political agenda, has created a situation that is in direct conflict with the need to evolve a national vision and outlook. Making a serious departure from the past which was characterized by broad national consensus on issues like foreign policy and national security, presently partisan approach is applied by different sections for petty political gains, seriously compromising the country's image and its long-term and vital interests. Even vital issues of development, in which our common people have the greatest stake, are held hostage to such divisive and confrontationist politics. The people watching all these, and finding themselves at the receiving end, are increasingly feeling helpless and despondent about such short-sighted and insensitive course of politics and are beginning to lose faith in the political system. All these call for serious introspection and concerted efforts from all concerned to restore politics on a healthier course for the benefit of all.

Democratic India today presents a contrasting picture of affluence, and deprivation. On the one hand is the India of the rich, of those who have had the benefit of modern education and are intellectually and materially empowered and, on the other, is the India of those who live under conditions of poverty, deprivation, squalor, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices. Though we have succeeded in considerably reducing the magnitude of social iniquity, large sections of the people are still victims of the stratified social structure. Our endeavours for empowering women have only met with partial success. They are still not ensured of their due space in the larger representative and political decision-making bodies. Issues like lop-sided development, regional imbalances, with a sizeable section of the people living below the poverty line experiencing unemployment and under-employment, and denied of the benefits of advances in science and technology, without access to safe drinking water, dependable energy supply and good health-care continue to bedevil our governance mechanism. That being so, we have to concede that we have not been able to take the fullest advantage of democratic governance in the past six decades.

It is a strange paradox that while in the last decade, our economy grew at an average annual rate of about 7 per cent or more, about 40 per cent of the world's poor still live in India. In spite of the completion of ten Five-Year Plans and implementation of numerous developmental schemes, nearly one third of our population is living below the poverty line. More than a fifth of our population even now does not have any access to quality health-care. With about a third of our population being illiterate, we are home to the largest number of illiterates in the world. Only about 10 per cent of our University-eligible youth have the real opportunity for that. A country with such an unequal distribution of opportunities and wealth will only create greater challenges for security and stability. According to Prof. Amartya Sen, 'The biggest failure in India is social inequality; it takes its toll both directly—in terms of quality of life—and indirectly—in terms of reducing the economic opportunities that the people have.' The polity fractured on religious, caste, regional and linguistic basis is greatly weakening our democratic structure and stifling the country's progress, and it needs serious attention and sincere national efforts to reverse the process.

Several institutions associated with our democracy, from which the common people have great expectations, have not always been able to rise up to those popular expectations. Even after six decades of self-governance, we still have not succeeded in establishing an administrative framework sensitive to the needs of the people—the common man is still treated with indifference, if not contempt, by the bureaucracy in general. Nepotism, corruption, insensitivity to the concerns of the citizens and lack of transparency are the base of our bureaucracy. On another plane, the backlog of millions of pending cases has virtually paralyzed our legal system. Legal proceedings generally take years to be completed and are often not accessible to the average citizen. As a result, legal protection tends to remain beyond the effective reach of the people, mostly the poor. Not only have the courts become unapproachable and unaffordable for a large section of our population, the inordinately slow justice delivery system has shaken the faith of our citizens in our judicial system itself. Those at the receiving end of the system, obviously, end up suffering terrible injustice.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to take the initiative to restore our democracy on track, to win back the confidence of our people. Political reforms must be central to the overall reform of our society. The electoral system needs to be reformed and revamped to strengthen the representative character of our democracy. Presently, people are left with no initiative to convey their disapproval of their elected representatives' performance, except by waiting till the next elections. To begin with, people must have the power to recall their elected representatives in the event the latter are not acting in tune with their interests. This will send a message and a warning, both, to political

parties and to the politicians who do not follow the accepted norms of democracy.

The question we have to ask ourselves in this unhappy scenario is 'where did we go wrong?' Friends, the basic problem our democratic political system is facing today, to my mind, is that we tend to view politics, divorced from the social processes. Instead of looking at politics in isolation, we must understand that since politics is a part of the social transformation, the true nature of society would naturally reflect in the political processes also. In this context, it is worth recalling the words of Lenin, one of the greatest revolutionaries of the 20th Century, who said that if politics determines our destiny, then we must determine what our politics be.

In other words, every citizen in a democracy must concern himself with the way the affairs of the State are managed and consciously associate himself with the democratic processes. John Stuart Mill's wise words that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty must be understood in this context. Only when we take proactive interest to participate in and contribute to public affairs, can optimum conditions be created for good governance. As Plato said, if good people are not willing to enter politics, then they should be ready to be governed by bad people. And this is precisely the problem with Indian democratic politics today. When things go wrong, we are ready to indulge in the blame game, accusing almost everybody around, except ourselves. I firmly believe that unless public apathy towards politics is changed, we will find undeserving people gaining entry into our representative bodies, greatly compromising their sanctity as the highest forum of democratic debate, which will have serious consequences.

Last year, we conducted two Round Table Discussions under the auspices of the Lok Sabha on the theme of strengthening parliamentary democracy by involving eminent people from various walks of life such as the media, academia, the Bar, the industry, Civil Society representatives and political leaders. The deliberations proved to be thought provoking and highly encouraging as they raised a seminal debate on several significant issues concerning our polity. Such discourse must be transformed into a public debate, thereby generating greater public awareness, which can help in creating a certain degree of consensus on the need and the ways and means to address the burning issues confronting the nation. In the context of reform, only when the society internalizes a solution to a problem, could the reform process be meaningful and successful. Legal measures to address the complex socio-economic and political issues alone would become only ornamental appendages to the Statute Book. It is here that the media can play a constructive role by generating an informed discourse on political reform.

It needs reiteration that the common man's concerns should get adequate space in public debate and in addressing the aberrations in the system. We need to create a sense of trust among the people by taking them on board the reforms process by helping to create a genuine feeling among them that their views and interests are given the weightage they deserve. This, I believe, is a way to fight the crisis of confidence that is felt by our people. Such collective spirit must be brought back to the center-stage of public discussion and the political system, to fight the menace of apathy that a majority of the people is demonstrating today.

Nobody talks of an alternative to or substitute for Parliamentary Democracy. Therefore, with the realization that it is out of our Parliament that the leadership that runs the affairs of our country emerges, we have to ensure that political workers, specially young men and women with commitment and dedication to the cause of the people, come into Parliament and actively participate in working the system. For the healthy survival of the system, it is important to ensure that the negative public perception of politics and of those in public life do not cloud the minds of the younger generations. As there is nothing greater than one's own country, they should be made to recognize that it is the collective and common responsibility of all the citizens to evolve ways and means to perfect our system of governance, rather than finding fault with it and running away from their responsibilities towards the system, expecting someone else to apply the correctives. The educated youth and the intelligentsia have a great responsibility in this. No one can guard our democracy better than the citizens themselves. This is the message that should be made loud and clear by the nation during the Fifteenth General Elections in the country.

Needless to say, the media can play a major role in reforming the polity and making our democracy vibrant. The highly competitive and commercially oriented media, as it is now, must come out of its obsession with sensationalism and focus attention on constructive issues and be critical, without fear or favour where it is necessary. Rather than becoming prophets of doom and undermining people's faith in the institutions, it should endeavour to reinforce their trust in them. They would do well to remember that only in a democracy does a free media flourish. The market-driven competitive journalism will hurt the long-term interest of our political system beyond repair. Remember, once democratic institutions lose popular trust, it will herald the beginning of anarchy.

We have seen the democratic system in operation in the country for over sixty years. As a system of governance, parliamentary democracy has suited India well, and there are no two questions about it. And, our Constitution was conceived by the best minds as an instrument to transform India into a

modern, strong, dynamic and a forward-looking nation. There are some people who would argue that the Constitution has failed and, therefore, we must review it or scrap it and frame a new Constitution. At the same time, there are others who argue that it is 'we, the people' who have failed the Constitution. However, as inheritors of the great legacy of the freedom struggle, those associated with the institutions of democracy at different levels need to bear in mind that providing the structural framework of governance is much easier than making them function in a manner sensitive to the needs of the people, accommodating the concerns of the marginalised, and with an all-inclusive and long-term vision for the nation as a whole. Towards the end of the deliberations of our Constituent Assembly, its President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, exhorted its Members stating: "We have prepared a democratic Constitution. But successful working of democratic institutions requires in those who have to work them willingness to respect the viewpoints of others, capacity for compromise and accommodation...."

It is high time all our democratic institutions began to demonstrate a greater degree of sensitivity and responsiveness to the growing disenchantment among the people with different aspects of our national life, particularly our political life. Parliament, as the apex body, has the responsibility to deliberate on important issues and it is expected that those constituting it will rise above narrow, sectarian interests and will be instruments in helping to evolve a national perspective on all issues before the country. They should collectively focus on issues that unite us, rather than on those that tend to divide us. To my mind, democracy cannot be sustained unless everyone associated with its functioning demonstrates a democratic spirit and the spirit of accommodation. It is of the utmost importance to facilitate the functioning of democratic institutions and to use them as effective fora before which all other institutions of governance ultimately have to submit.

If we have to sustain and reinforce our people's faith in the democratic institutions, we have to realize the imperative of integrity and honesty in our public life. We need to seriously think about and address the issues of corruption, criminalisation and the communalisation of politics, the vicious role being played by money and muscle power, inadequate representation of women and the growing trend of bigotry and intolerance in our society.

We must spare no effort in combating the forces and elements which are trying to vitiate our socio-political fabric and undermine our democratic institutions. Divisive and exclusivist politics will have to give way to a broad-based national political agenda. The Agenda for India should be to strive together to ensure that the politics of confrontation and of intolerance gives way to one of reconciliation and accommodation in the larger national interest.

I would appeal to all stakeholders of democracy to work together to correct the imperfections that have crept into the system and to remain on the course of inclusive development and thereby regain the trust and confidence of the people.

Our country is faced with various challenges on its security front, putting enormous pressure and making heavy demands on our security forces. The growing menace of terrorism, no matter what its source is, is the biggest threat to national security. Terrorism and its perpetrators have vitiated the social and political environment by unleashing a kind of tyranny over the minds of the people. What we have to bear in mind is that the objective of terrorists is not merely to inflict grave physical damage on lives and properties but also to disrupt civilized existence and orderly social relations by creating hatred and disharmony in society. Their chief targets are open democratic societies and they do not hesitate to exploit the strengths of democracy such as the freedom of movement, open access to public places, and relatively transparent sources of information in the public domain to execute their nefarious designs. Without doubt, only a united country can effectively deal with such challenges and for that to happen we have to strengthen the edifice of our democracy.

In a plural society like India, the representative institutions are what late V.K. Krishna Menon called 'the safety valves' in the larger social system. It is through the forum of our Parliament that the commitment to democracy is best expressed in India. The most important requirement for democratic institutions to perform well is to create conditions which are conducive for those institutions to function effectively.

In this critical juncture, we need statesmen, we need visionaries, we need sagacious leadership to steer the ship of the nation. Our endeavour should be to carry all sections of our people with us in the task of working a democratic system. The institutions of governance, particularly the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary, along with a watchful Media, public-spirited Civil Service, and a vigilant Civil Society can all be collaborative partners in this national endeavour to uphold democracy.

We have to recognize that only under a progressive and forward looking leadership, committed to broad national values and inclusiveness, can a markedly pluralistic society facing enormous developmental challenges, harness the national talents for the holistic growth of the country. If centrifugal and centripetal forces work simultaneously pulling the country in opposite directions, not only will we be pulling our country backward, but we will be creating conditions for distortions and disintegration. Democratic consolidation and national integration can be successful only if the whole national leadership and the people at large, particularly the youth of the country, who have the

greatest stake in its future, work with unity of purpose, with abiding faith in a value-based system taking every section of our diverse population along in the process. There is an urgent imperative for effective political polarisation around larger national issues and forward-looking policies and programmes relevant to all the classes and categories of our diverse population.

Friends, concerned as we all are with the future of our country, its prospects, its ability to fulfil the avowed mission of securing the all round development as envisioned in the Constitution and thus earning a place of honour among the comity of nations, we all have to introspect and collectively explore the ways and means to address the challenges before our country. The time has come when all sections of the people have to consider very seriously how a country like ours, with its great heritage and civilization, with the magnificent history of its freedom struggle and also with the great talent of its people, should come out of the present drawbacks and infirmities in the system and focus all energies for effective democratic consolidation and to achieve all-round development at a faster pace. Given the will, we can surely do as this nation has shown in diverse areas, like in science and technology, in information technology, in the pulsating system of self-governance and in achieving a steady overall economic growth apart from maintaining the basic foundation of our democratic system. And as the world's largest democracy goes to the polls yet again, every conscientious citizen should take informed decisions on the future of democracy in the country. I am sure the people will give their verdict, as they have always done, with maturity and farsightedness.

Before I conclude, I once again thank the Capital Foundation Society for providing me this opportunity to share my views with you all. I wish the Society all success in their future endeavours.

Thank you.

II

MAINTAINING HARMONIOUS RELATIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT ORGANS OF THE STATE

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEGISLATURE AND THE JUDICIARY*

It is a great privilege and honour for me to address this august gathering. I warmly welcome you all to the Symposium on 'The Relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary'. The theme of today's Symposium is of crucial importance for the proper functioning of our democratic set-up. The issue has been discussed on several occasions in one context or another at the forum of Presiding Officers' Conference. I am glad that we got another opportunity to deliberate on the issue as it is essential to keep in mind the importance of the concept of separation of powers, which is one of the basic features of our Constitution, in the discharge of the duties and functions of the Legislatures as well as the other organs of the State.

We justifiably take pride that we are the largest democracy in the world. Parliamentary democracy, which is the basic foundation of our constitutional set-up, pre-supposes the sovereignty of the people. In the exercise of sovereign power, the people of India have given to themselves the Constitution, which constitutes India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic to secure to the citizens of the country Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

As a prerequisite for a functional parliamentary democracy, our Constitution has provided for separation of powers for securing the basic rights of the people and has consciously introduced a scheme of checks and balances in the exercise of powers, with the very important object of ensuring that power is not concentrated in any particular organ, which can assume undesirable proportion. Functional distribution of powers amongst various organs of the State, *viz.* the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary, the characteristic feature of parliamentary democracy, is essentially to save the people from arbitrary action and oppressive rule.

The fundamental concept of democracy is that it is antithetical to arbitrariness and despotism and is based on the principles of accountability. Accountability provides the life blood to any democratic set-up. Any authority in a democracy, which is not ultimately accountable to the people is prone to assume unregulated and uncontrolled power, based on its own predilections, as it assumes to be not answerable to anybody else for its actions.

* At the Symposium on the *Relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary* during the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, Kolkata (11 October, 2004).

We should bear in mind that the Constitution, while subjecting all the organs of the State to its overriding authority, did not give any unchecked power to any organ. The three principal organs are expected to work in harmony, each respecting the authority of the other and without trespassing into the areas assigned to any other. Largely, this arrangement has worked smoothly in India, except for the occasional dispute centering around issues and subjects not so well defined by the Constitution. The fact that even in dealing with such instances, the supremacy of the Constitution has prevailed, speaks of the soundness of the basic scheme of things provided for in our Constitution.

To the extent that even the Legislature has to function within the bounds of a written Constitution, with its authority hedged in by the scheme of distribution of powers between the different organs and a justiciable code of Fundamental Rights and its constituent and the law-making powers being subject to the test of their conformity to the Constitution, to be decided by an independent Judiciary, describes the setting in which our Legislature exists *vis-a-vis* the Judiciary. The founding fathers of our Constitution had visualized a harmonious co-existence and smooth functioning of these organs in the interest of effective governance.

According to our Constitution, both the Legislature and the Judiciary have well-defined areas of activities and they are supreme in their own spheres. Nevertheless, the fact remains that being the supreme representative of the people as well as the highest legislative body, the Parliament has been accorded a pre-eminent position in our constitutional and political set-up. It has the necessary authority for enacting new laws and for amending the existing ones to suit the changing needs and aspirations of the people as are judged by the peoples' representatives. An ordinance, which is law made by the Executive, can remain effective beyond its limited period only if it is made a statute passed by Parliament, which shows that all laws must have the assent of the Legislature.

At the same time, the framers of the Constitution had taken due care to provide for an independent and impartial Judiciary as the custodian of the rights of the citizens. All the legislations – whether Union, State or delegated— have been made subject to the doctrine of *ultra vires* and judicial review. The Judiciary has the mandate to interpret the Constitution and the laws. But the scope of the Judiciary is limited to see whether the impugned legislation falls within the limits of the power conferred and whether it contravenes any of the articles of the Constitution or is inconsistent with any other existing law. The Courts are not to enter into a discussion on nor can decide what the law should be, as they can not prescribe how the Legislatures or even the Executive should function in their respective areas.

The Parliament is also vested with the constituent power to amend any provision of the Constitution but without altering its basic structure or framework. The final say as to what the basic structure is, however, rests with the Supreme Court. There is no denying the fact that balancing and respecting each other's power is crucial for the smooth functioning of the system envisaged by the Constitution. Any attempt to disturb this balance would certainly lead to controversies affecting the country's governance. There should be well established norms and conventions which guide the interface between the Legislature and the Judiciary and both should act with self-restraint and not seek to upset the balance of power.

You are all well aware that subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the Parliament and the State Legislatures are empowered to regulate their own procedures. Under Articles 122 and 212, the validity of any proceedings of the Houses cannot be questioned in a Court of law on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure. Moreover, under Articles 105 and 194, the Constitution guarantees immunity from proceedings in any court in respect of 'anything' said or any vote given in the House or any Committee thereof.

Our Constitution contains specific provisions to ensure that the Judiciary remains independent of the influence of other organs. Among other things, the method of appointment of Judges, their tenure, salary, staff, etc. have specifically been provided for in the Constitution, which have been interpreted by the Courts to confer final authority on the Judiciary to decide judicial appointments on the ground of securing its independence. It has specifically been provided that the conduct of a Judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court in the discharge of his duties cannot be discussed in Parliament. The only exception being a substantive motion required for presenting an address to the President for removal of a Judge. Subject to the decision of the Presiding Officers, matters which are *sub judice*, are also not discussed in the Legislatures by way of self-imposed restriction.

Although both the Legislature and the Judiciary are the creatures of the Constitution working within their respective spheres, issues have arisen from time to time, which seem to have detracted from the usual position of complementary relationship between them. Most of these are mainly related to the decisions by the Presiding Officers under the anti-defection law and to the field of parliamentary privileges.

The experience of nearly two decades shows that the power of the Presiding Officers to decide the cases of disqualification on the basis of defection has been questioned in the courts on several grounds which has disturbed the even tempo in the relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary. Reference may be made to the case of *Kihota Hollohan vs. Zachilhu and others* where the Hon'ble Supreme Court by its judgement given on

12 November 1991, upheld the legality and constitutionality of all the provisions of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution dealing with anti-defection measures except para 7 which provides that no Court shall have any jurisdiction in respect of any matter connected with the disqualification of a member of a House under the Tenth Schedule. The Court held that paragraph 7 was *ultra vires* of the Constitution, as in its view, the provision affected the operation and effect of Articles 136, 226 and 227 of the Constitution and should have been ratified by the State Legislatures in accordance with the proviso to clause (2) of Article 368 of the Constitution. The Court also declared that while exercising its powers under the anti-defection law, the Speaker/ Chairman acts as an ordinary Tribunal adjudicating rights and obligations of members and their decisions in that capacity are amenable to judicial review, though the Speaker is the custodian of the rights and powers of the House and exercises the powers in his capacity as the Speaker, representing the House as a whole.

Another area of concern is the powers, privileges and immunities of the Legislature *vis-a-vis* the Judiciary. The question whether the powers and privileges conferred by Articles 105 and 194 of the Constitution are beyond judicial scrutiny, has often been discussed at various Presiding Officers' Conferences. The matter came up before the Presiding Officers' Conference of 1965, after the opinion of the Supreme Court on Special Reference No. 1 of 1964 regarding the conflict between the U.P. Vidhan Sabha and the Allahabad High Court was tendered. The Court held that the powers and privileges conferred on State Legislatures under Article 194(3) are subject to the Fundamental Rights and that the Legislatures do not have the privilege or power to the effect that their general warrants should be held to be conclusive. The matter once again came into focus in 1984 in the wake of the issues arising out of the two privilege cases relating to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council and the Kerala Legislative Assembly. As the privileges of the Legislatures were involved, an Emergent Conference of Presiding Officers was convened on 25 April, 1984. A Resolution was unanimously passed at the Conference upholding the exclusive jurisdiction of the Legislatures to decide all matters relating to the privileges of the House and its members without any interference from the Court of Law or any other authority.

I feel, and I believe you will agree with me, that we have rightly been holding the view that the framers of the Constitution intended to provide the Legislatures in India with exclusive jurisdiction to decide all matters relating to the privileges without any interference from the Court of law or any other authority. In fact what we need is to place the position beyond all shadow of doubt either through an amendment to the Constitution or through a law enacted by Parliament in pursuance of the authority conferred on it by Article 105(3) of our Constitution. It is, however, for the Legislatures to decide

upon the course they wish to take. We can certainly use this opportunity to deliberate upon what exactly needs to be done in this direction.

Of late, the issue of judicial activism is attracting the attention of the constitutional experts, legal luminaries and others. Many parliamentarians and legislators have expressed the view that the Judiciary has, at times, been found transgressing its jurisdiction and entering into the domain of the Executive and the Legislature. The proponents of judicial activism take it as a normal assertion of judicial power, as a part of the judicial review and the necessary in-built mechanism to uphold the Rule of Law and the principles of natural justice in the country.

But the moot question here is: What has actually led to the phenomenon of judicial activism? What or whose problems does the Judiciary seek to resolve as part of judicial function? No doubt, it is essential to have a proper understanding among the three organs of the State, while discharging different responsibilities. They are meant to be active within their own limits, and through their individual functioning, they are expected to reinforce each other. If they overstep their assigned limits or display trends towards unexpected exercise of what they assume to be their power, each one of them suffers and in the process the ultimate casualty is the larger national interest.

What is important to bear in mind is that there is a symbiotic relationship between different institutions of Government in a democracy. If we do anything that will undermine the effectiveness of any of these institutions, it will have its adverse impact on the system as a whole, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of the State itself. It is, therefore, imperative for all of us to work together creating conditions for the harmonious functioning of all the institutions, keeping the larger public good in view. Looked at from this angle, there is no reason why there should be any tension among the organs while performing their designated tasks and within their specified area, for the goals of all the three are the same, which is: achieving the objectives of the Constitution for the benefit of the society.

The Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary owe equal responsibility for strengthening the edifice of a just and fair system. Their roles are supplementary and complementary to each other. They are not envisaged to be competing centres of power. Each has to show respect for the specific role of the other in the governance of the country and ultimately towards the well being of the real masters—the people—and should not encroach into each others territory on their own subjective interpretation as to what their powers are. There is no superior organ *inter se*. As the custodians of the interests of the entire nation, they are expected to observe very high standards of integrity, probity and rectitude. The ethical values that permeate the three organs of the State have a deep and lasting impact on the character, credibility and

creativity at different levels of the society. They have to work as an integrating force protecting as well as disciplining the diverse interests and forces of the society in mutual respect and civility.

As already stated and to summarise, all the organs of the State are guided by and owe their powers to the Constitutional provisions. Our Constitution provides for and contemplates harmonious relationship for each organ operating within its own territory. Supremacy of the Parliament in its own sphere is as the Constitution provides and it does not depend upon any concession by any authority nor upon the interpretation by any authority as to what it means. Parliament represents the sovereign will of the people and the people are the masters and they act through their chosen representatives in Parliament. The basic postulate of parliamentary democracy, where the Parliament represents the people as the highest representative forum of the country, is that it is not amenable to the jurisdiction of any other authority. Except as expressly permitted by the Constitution, which I have mentioned already, no authority should assume the power to question or nullify Parliament's decision or action as per the provision of the Constitution. Exercise of power by any authority should not disturb the constitutional balance and create tension in the body politic and uncertainty amongst the people.

I am sure these issues will be discussed in a comprehensive manner so that deliberations here will not only help the parliamentarians but all the authorities whose powers depend on the constitutional provisions.

Thank you.

CONSTITUTION, PARLIAMENT AND THE PEOPLE*

It is indeed an honour for me to be invited to deliver this Lecture instituted in the memory of one of the distinguished sons of modern India, late Shri Bhimsen Sachar. I am grateful to the Servants of the People Society and the Bhimsen Sachar Memorial Committee for providing me with this opportunity to pay my respectful homage to the memory of Shri Bhimsen Sachar.

The Servants of the People Society and its allied organisations have been rendering invaluable services to the country for the past more than eight decades. The names associated with the history of this society, were all men of great stature and known for their leadership, honesty and integrity and the spirit of sacrifice for the country. The causes like accountability and transparency in public life, tolerance and co-existence among all sections of the people and selfless service to the society that they are striving to uphold still remain fundamental to the future progress of our country and the well-being of our people. Today living through the sixth decade of our freedom, it is of vital importance that the country is reminded of the values and principles that guided our freedom movement, and of the sacrifices of the great men and women who led us to freedom and to a dignified existence. Late Bhimsen Sachar was among those in the forefront of our freedom movement and once free, stood like the sentinel of that hard-earned freedom, till the last breath of their lives.

Jumping into the arena of the freedom movement at a very young age, Shri Sachar remained a symbol of resistance to the colonial rulers, in undivided Punjab. He was ever ready to pay any price for that resistance to the powers that be. He underwent long years of imprisonment during the freedom struggle. He was one of the most popular and widely accepted leaders of pre-partition Punjab which made him the natural choice to be a Minister in the Government formed there in 1946.

By the time we achieved freedom, and when partition became a *fait accompli*, Sachar had emerged as the tallest leader in Punjab. Like the other patriots and heroes of our national movement, Bhimsenji was also greatly saddened by the partition of the country that came with the freedom. But the

* At the Shri Bhimsen Sachar Memorial Lecture on *Constitution, Parliament and the People*, organised by the Servants of the People Society and the Bhimsen Sachar Memorial Committee, New Delhi (1 December 2004).

die-hard optimist that he was, he thought that there was room for everyone in both the countries even after partition. His hopes, however, were belied and it did not take long before he realized that his future was inter-linked with that of India and he returned to India. His committed involvement in addressing the problems of those who were forced to migrate to India in the wake of partition further endeared him to all sections of the people in the new Punjab which he later came to lead as the Chief Minister. We have seen the impact of the quality of leadership provided to Punjab in its early post-independence years in the kind of development that the State has achieved over the years.

By the time Bhimsenji retired from active politics in 1956, there was virtually no aspect of Punjab's life that he was not associated with. In all the public offices that he occupied—whether it was that of the Minister or Chief Minister of Punjab, or the constitutional Office of the Governor of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, or as our High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, he conducted himself with great dignity and efficiency and a high sense of responsibility, adhering to Gandhian values and ever committed to probity. There was no room for narrow or divisive thinking in his mind. He was, undoubtedly, one of the most distinguished sons of modern India and I pay my respectful homage to his memory. I compliment the Servants of the People Society for instituting this Lecture Series in his memory. I am sure, his life, ideals and contributions will continue to inspire and guide us in building a strong India with people proud of their achievement and in preserving our hard-earned freedom.

Friends, when I decided to speak on the subject 'The Constitution, the Parliament and the People', I did not wish to talk on the mere provisions of the Constitution or about the set-up of the Parliament and about the general condition of the people in this country. I felt that it was necessary to emphasise on the importance of the people in our constitutional set-up in which Parliament occupies the pivotal position. The subject is of wide magnitude and to me it is of great importance because unfortunately a lot of cynicism is being expressed about the adequacy of our Constitution and of the efficacy of the parliamentary system itself from the point of view of protecting and advancing the peoples' interests in the kind of democratic set-up that we have.

The early years in the life of a Republic is the period for laying the institutional foundations and for consolidating the gains of freedom. That is taken to be the primary responsibility of a new Republic's leadership. Later, it is these institutions that are expected to produce the leaders who can sustain that freedom. The greatest challenge on the Founding Fathers, in the wake of freedom, was to come up with a viable system of Government that

would reflect and represent the diversities of India and at the same time constructively govern it for the years to come. It was a well-considered and well-thoughtout decision to adopt a parliamentary system of Government for free India.

In doing so, we were, in fact, not merely adopting a system of Government that had roots in England and was in vogue, in an imperfect way, in our country during the colonial rule, but was also laying the foundations of a truly working representative Government. Our Founding Fathers were convinced that given India's pluralism and heterogeneity, only the parliamentary system can hold the country together while providing sufficient space for our diversities to co-exist. The overriding consideration, to my mind, was to ensure the centrality of our people in the political processes of the country. A plain reading of the Preamble to our Constitution reinforces this centrality. When we consider the manner in which we secured freedom, after long years of people's struggle, it will become clear that nothing short of this visibly representative character of our political system would have done justice to that popular struggle.

Throughout the long years of our freedom struggle, our people had been looking forward to the day when we could decide our own future, to prepare our own charter of development, to decide our own economic policies, to remove discrimination and disparity amongst the people, to provide opportunities so that the citizens could live with dignity as human beings in a free country. 'Wiping away every tear from every eye' was to become the national commitment thereafter. Removal of poverty, universal education, an effective health care system, jobs for all and other initiatives which could transform our nation into a resurgent and dynamic one, capable of playing its due role in the comity of nations were to become the national priorities after winning the freedom.

Achievement of socio-economic and political justice was listed in the Preamble to our Constitution, as among the basic objectives to be realised by our Government for the people at large. While codifying a long list of Fundamental Rights for our citizens, the Constitution also laid down another list of instructions which are called the Directive Principles of State Policy, which is like a manifesto of the welfare State, meant to guide the leadership in formulating socio-economic policies for the country. The core of the Directive Principles is enshrined in Article 38 which echoes the whole Preamble and stipulates that 'the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice—social, economic and political—shall inform all the institutions of the national life.' Further, the provisions of Article 39 (though not enforceable) indicate what should permeate every governmental function, that all citizens, men

and women have the right to an adequate means of livelihood, that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community should be so distributed as to subserve the common good and that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment. Other provisions of Part IV deal, *inter alia*, with equal justice, right to work and education, living wages for workers, participation of workers in management, free and compulsory education for children until they are fourteen, etc.

Certain rights, which are treated as inalienable and fundamental to all citizens are protected against State infringement by the provisions contained in Part III of the Constitution. Right of Equality is one of the important Fundamental Rights of the people which covers within its ambit prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and also enjoins equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. The basic freedoms, subject to reasonable restrictions, which every citizen is expected to enjoy in our country are elaborated in Article 19 of the Constitution.

Articles 25 and 26 ensure to all persons right to freedom of religion, that is, the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion and freedom to manage religious affairs and the protection of the cultural and educational rights of the minorities.

The purpose of the Fundamental Rights is to create an egalitarian society, to free all citizens from coercion or restriction by society and from all forms of discrimination and thereby providing real meaning and content to our democratic experiments for the common people. The purpose of the Directive Principles is to fix certain social and economic goals for immediate attainment by bringing about a social revolution. Through such a social revolution, the Constitution seeks to fulfil the basic needs of the common man and to change the structure of our society. It aims at making the Indian masses free in the positive sense. As an eminent Professor of our constitutional history, Granville Austin, observed, the core of India's 'commitment to the social revolution lies in Part III and IV...these are the conscience of the Constitution'. The majority of our constitutional provisions, according to him, 'are either directly arrived at furthering the aim of social revolution or attempt to foster this revolution by establishing conditions necessary for its achievements.'

However, over the years, we have found that we have not been able to honour many of the commitments made to our people through the Constitution. Aberrations and distortions have taken place in the functioning, not only of the State but also of the political and administrative systems, as a result of which large sections of the people are unable to enjoy even the

minimum rights which the Constitution had contemplated for them. The condition of the working class in the country is still extremely uncertain. We cannot deny the fact that problems like poverty, illiteracy, child mortality, lack of job opportunities for the young people, non-availability of pure drinking water in many areas, lack of health care facilities, among others, have resulted in undermining the importance of freedom for the people.

Everyone who observes India believes that our country has immense possibilities and potential, but its natural development is not taking place because its political and administrative structures have not been demonstrating the desired level of commitment to the ideas and objectives espoused by our Founding Fathers and enshrined in our Constitution. Our performance of the last nearly six decades of freedom, still leaves much to be desired. Issues which concern the people in everyday life for their sustenance and development namely, right to work, right to free and compulsory education, right to secure justice, living wages to workers, etc. as listed in the Directive Principles of State Policy, should have been made enforceable to ensure accountability by the administration. While in most respects, these Principles have remained unfulfilled and even though there are interferences with the exercise of Fundamental Rights of the people, the common people and particularly the working class of the country have shown great maturity in the face of serious handicaps.

The country's strength lies in its unity in diversity. Secularism cannot be a mere jargon or paper provision of the Constitution. Mixing of religion with politics has disturbed the even tempo of our national life. Tolerance, which is the very basic postulate of all religions, as all sane people understand, is now being replaced by feelings of animosity affecting the unity of the people. Activities in the name of religion are creating a communal divide amongst the people. There are well-calculated efforts to emphasize on the so-called differences between the people on the basis of their caste, language, religion and custom instead of emphasizing on the commonality and unity between them. The concept of India's basic unity is paramount and its paramountcy can never be diluted.

Politics is also fast becoming a game of economic offenders, mafias, religious fanatics and fundamentalists. Our temple of democracy is being desecrated by divisive and obscurantist forces. Degeneration of our electoral system as a result of illegal and immoral practices used for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity. In the absence of political will, recommendations made by different Committees for Electoral Reforms have remained unimplemented. Unless we are able to completely eliminate the nexus between politics and crime and also between politics and religion, the country is in danger of losing its

identity. Today, our freedom is becoming a fissured one because of contrived division of our people.

One of the causes, to my mind, which has hindered our balanced development and progress is the imperfect federal structure of our constitutional set-up. The unbalanced distribution of powers between the Centre and the States has resulted in an uneven development of the country. In a country like India, with a myriad of problems, with unequal development of different States, and areas having specific regional problems which are not common to the country as a whole, with special urges and aspirations of different groups of people, it is essential that the true spirit of federalism pervades our constitutional set-up.

It is imperative that meaningful and effective autonomy is given to the States so that they could frame their own policies, raise their own resources and make their own laws to meet their particular needs according to their capacity. A new orientation should pervade our Centre-State relations and it is high time that a closer look is given to the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and those on which there are broad agreements, particularly relating to distribution of financial resources, should be implemented soon. Such an approach will lessen the tension between the Centre and the States and also between the States.

Ours is a pluralistic society and a true federal structure is necessary to reconcile the urges and aspirations of the people and for the maintenance of national unity and integrity and that can only be achieved if the Centre and the States consider themselves as partners in the important task of nation building and providing the wherewithal to the people.

Lack of accountability of the governing institutions and individuals is one of our greatest bane. The other major deficiency is the lack of transparency in the decision-making processes. There is an impression that has gained ground that criminals with recourse to resource and influence can remain out of the reach of legal processes and there is a question mark also about the proper enforcement of our criminal justice system. We have scores of scams and corruption of different hues. It is essential to bring back probity in our political and administrative functioning, with a sense of urgency. Due to the activities of some politicians, question mark has been raised about the credibility of the politicians as a whole. Fortunately, there are still parties and organisations who have not joined the bandwagon and are free from such distortions and aberrations. Unless we all strive together for achieving the primacy of the constitutional goals with a commitment to legal and constitutional methods, we cannot produce the desired result.

Of course, I am not overlooking our achievements made in several areas of national life in the past nearly six decades. Our young men and women, boys and girls, overcoming severe handicaps have attained great proficiency in several fields. Our scientists have made significant achievements, their efficiency and calibre are well-acknowledged. Our Gross Domestic Product has increased, as has the standard of living of the people, though only of small sections of the people. In higher and technical education, there have been significant achievements, our agriculture has also developed and it would have been spectacular if land reforms had been implemented, as has been done in some States. We have been able to maintain our parliamentary system of democracy; the voters of the country have shown remarkable maturity in spite of interference caused in the way of free and fair exercise of franchise by people indulging in questionable tactics. We should not try to ignore or underplay the achievements wherever and whenever made, though they have been for the benefit of only limited sections of the people.

Those people who deserve to receive their entitlements under the Constitution are waiting for long and only by their efforts can accountability be enforced. Communalism, secessionism, corruption and divisiveness are anathema to the letter and spirit of our Constitution and only united national endeavour can assure to the people what is justly due to them. Along with other initiatives, we also need to think about a comprehensive judicial reform. The criminal justice system in the country desires much improvement.

Friends, having identified some of our failures, I must hasten to add that these failures cannot be attributed to the system of governance we adopted in the wake of freedom. What we are experiencing in the polity today are the result of the aberrations that have crept into the system. I firmly believe that there is no better alternative to parliamentary democracy with adult franchise and a federal set-up. Parliament symbolises the very ethos of our country. It mirrors the country as a whole. It embodies and articulates the urges and aspirations of the people and they look up to Parliament to discharge its duties in fulfilling their hopes and legitimate demands. Over the years, our Parliament has come to be identified, both in theory and in practice, to be the pivot of our political system. The responsibility for providing direction, momentum and the institutions for social engineering in India has been on our Parliament.

The House of the People, that is Lok Sabha, is the highest body in our country and the most important people's forum under our constitutional set-up. The voice of the people, their problems, their demands, their urges and aspirations are expected to find articulation in Parliament through the members. The very basis of parliamentary democracy is accountability of the Government of the day to the people of the country, whose representatives

are elected to the Parliament and through whom that accountability is expected to be enforced. This was the principal rationale for adopting a parliamentary system for the country. As Dr. Ambedkar said, in choosing the parliamentary system they 'preferred more responsibility to stability'.

It is essential that the members of Parliament function in a manner which would compel the Government of the day to discharge its responsibility to the people and govern in a responsible and transparent manner. A vigilant Parliament like a vigilant Press provides safeguard to a democracy from degenerating into a dictatorship. Ultimately, the justification of all public institutions, and the Parliament is the most important one, lies in its ability to respond to the needs of the people and solve their problems. Its performance and non-performance are closely watched by the people. Thus there is a close, and proximate relationship between the people and the Parliament which has not only to be nurtured but also has to be made more meaningful and more rewarding.

To be effective, the Parliament has to function in a disciplined and organised manner, as a living institution. A huge sum of money is spent for running the Parliament and the proper functioning of Parliament not only ensures due utilisation of funds provided by the people but also will make the functioning result-oriented. Intelligent intervention, even interruptions and humorous repartees make the functioning of Parliament more interesting. But what is unfortunately seen in recent years is that there are, sometimes, attempts to disturb the proceedings of the Houses of Parliament by taking recourse to lung power and, in some cases, even muscle power, which not only interferes with the due functioning of Parliament but also seriously affects its image, resulting in the loss of its credibility and effectiveness as the most important public forum in the country.

It is an undeniable fact that in a country like ours, where parliamentary system of governance is in vogue, the people should have the opportunity to know how their representatives, in fact, are functioning in Parliament. Here, the role of the media is not only extremely important but without a vigilant, fearless and responsible press, which seeks to inform the people of the country of the deliberations in the House, dealing with their issues and problems, the latter will remain un-informed, which also minimises the role of Parliament as the most important institution. After all, it is the faith and confidence of the people in the system that sustains it and the parliamentary system of governance will be greatly strengthened by more active participation of the people in public affairs, which can be generated adequately through factual reports provided to them.

To my mind, at the moment, there is no alternative to parliamentary democracy as the system of governance of our country. The Parliament is the

highest constitutional body in the country, it represents the people who choose their representatives and enforce the accountability of the Government through the House of the People. The importance of Parliament as such can never be minimised and any attempt to weaken the parliamentary system or to make it non-functioning should be resisted at all cost. Stopping the sittings of the House because of what are perceived to be important issues is totally counter-productive even for those who bring about the same. Unfortunately, a feeling has developed in the country amongst all the political parties that interruption of parliamentary proceedings and ultimately its premature adjournment will establish the importance of the subject or the issue. This feeling has to be removed.

Obstruction to Parliament's functioning should be equated with expression of lack of confidence in the parliamentary system itself, if not, as a declaration of war on the people of the country. Unfortunately, almost all the major political parties and even the smaller ones share this belief and attitude. The elected representatives of the people have a solemn responsibility not only to their electors but also to the nation as a whole. There has been tremendous public criticism against the members of Parliament because of what is perceived to be their irresponsible behaviour and such criticism may degenerate into a resolve to change the system itself which will be disastrous for the country. Thus, the members of Parliament and the political parties owe a great responsibility to the people of the country as a whole to maintain the decorum and decency of the parliamentary institution itself.

In the Constitution, elaborate provisions have been made to indicate the respective areas of the functioning of the three organs and the powers they can exercise. For the effective functioning of the system, it is also imperative for each organ of the State to adhere to the scheme of distribution of powers as provided by the Constitution. All the three organs should work harmoniously and one should not try to encroach into the others' domain. On the Executive, authority is devolved to frame and implement programmes and policies, to meet the demands of the people, and to solve their problems, in accordance with, no doubt, the laws made by the Legislature as well as the provisions of the Constitution.

Though elaborate provisions have been made to enforce the accountability of the Government and to voice the people's grievances and problems, yet in practice the effectiveness gets stultified, if the members of Parliament do not or cannot provide an active link between the people and the institution by not being sufficiently equipped to discharge their obligation or because of their parties' policies or programmes. The President of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Rajendra Prasad had warned us of the dangers if the representatives of the people did not take their job seriously. He said: 'If the

people who are elected are capable men of character and integrity, they should be able to make the best of a defective Constitution. If they are lacking in these, the Constitution cannot help the country.' The deficiencies in the people entrusted with running the Government cannot be made up by changing the institutions.

This brings us to the important question of the proper composition of the Lok Sabha and other Legislatures, which has become, in a sense, a burning issue as the success of the parliamentary system depends not only on the proper and transparent functioning of the political parties based on their programmes and manifestos but also upon the effective representation by persons of competence, commitment and probity.

The near-riotous scenes sometimes seen in our Legislatures, including in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, not only bring shame to the great institutions and those who constitute them but also shake the faith of the people in the system itself, which has the inherent potential to weaken our democratic set-up. Large sections of the people are greatly worried about the nexus between crime and politics as well as administration in the country. I am saddened to observe that politics in the country has to a large extent, become criminalised and crime has become politicised. We have to address ourselves most seriously and urgently to the task of bringing about the essential changes in our electoral laws and system, so that their misuse does not vitiate the process. The nexus between crime and politics has to be ended and essential reforms should include making provision for securing due representation of all sections of the people.

There is a very strong demand to provide for at least one-third reservation for women in the Parliament and Legislatures. Such reservation is working well in Panchayats and Zilla Boards and should be extended to the Legislative Bodies as well. It will not only enable proper and adequate representation to those who constitute nearly half, if not more, of the country's population but will greatly accelerate the emancipation of our women and will provide them with the spirit of commitment, self-confidence and achievement. It is hoped that the major political parties in our country, will take the necessary initiative in this matter.

Friends, seven years back, during the celebrations marking fifty years of our Independence, we had attempted to assess the country's achievements, and to see for ourselves whether the common people of the country, particularly the toiling sections, the workers, peasants and farmers and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the minorities have been able to fulfil their minimum needs. To mark the occasion, Parliament of India held a Special Session to debate and discuss, not on party lines perhaps for the first time,

the country's successes and failures, and passed unanimously a Resolution containing the 'Agenda for India', pledging, *inter-alia*:

(i) To free the political life and processes of the adverse impact on governance of undesirable extraneous factors including criminalisation;

(ii) To launch continuous and proactive efforts for securing greater transparency, probity and accountability in public life;

(iii) To preserve and enhance the prestige of the Parliament;

(iv) To launch a vigorous national campaign to combat unsustainable growth of population;

(v) To achieve the constitutional mandate of universalisation of elementary education by 2005 and to make education at all levels employment – relevant;

(vi) To manage the national economy prudently with emphasis on achieving full employment, eliminating poverty, securing equity and social justice and balanced regional development;

(vii) To achieve, in a time bound manner, marked improvement in the quality of life of all citizens with special emphasis on provision of minimum needs for food, nutrition, health, security, potable water, sanitation and shelter; and

(viii) To establish gender justice with particular emphasis on education of the girl child.

These issues, to my mind, indicate the unfulfilled commitments and challenges, which still face us and as such call for urgent attention and solution.

Friends, can we tell ourselves with conviction that we have utilized all the opportunities we had with commitment to take India out of the club of the poor? Who is responsible for our failures on the political front and providing the space for communal elements to come up to the center-stage of our national life? Can we absolve ourselves for our failures in achieving the desired result of the full empowerment of the socially backward sections? Caste-based social stratification is a reality we have not been able to address in nearly six decades of freedom. Similarly, gender-based discrimination is yet another major crucial social issue we have failed in addressing. How long shall we wait for our women who constitute almost 50 per cent of our population to have an effective share in the political decision-making processes, especially in our representative institutions? When are we going to take the benefit of education to nearly five hundred million more of our citizens? When are we going to provide drinking water to nearly half a million more of our villages? What meaning do information and communications

technologies have for those thousands of our villages where electricity and telephones are yet to reach? When are we going to ensure good medical care and good road connectivity to all our villages? Who will provide jobs to the millions of unemployed in our country? Above all, and most fundamental of them all, is the question of when are we going to redeem the plight of the nearly 350 million of our citizens who live below the poverty line? The question of this mass poverty is still staring at the conscience of free India today. The freedom that we are talking about today have no meaning for all those unfortunate citizens who still live unsure of their next square meal.

These are the challenges before the nation today. These are the challenges that our political leadership and the civil society will have to address together if we want to make our freedom meaningful for all our citizens and if we have to give real meaning to our constitutional provisions. For this, it is imperative that we pool in all our national assets and our collective strength. The energy and resources that we have been wasting in the name of emotive and divisive issues should be channelised towards nation-building efforts. We need to recognize the fact that India lives in her villages. City-centric developments alone will not help in emancipating the substantial majority of our people to whom the fruits of the advances in science and technology and development are yet to reach even after more than half a century of our freedom.

In the ultimate analysis, the test of a good Government lies in its ability to take suitable measures to redress the people's grievances and to take the country forward in all senses of the term, so that the common people, particularly the weakest sections of our people, derive the benefit of development. Unless there is a commitment to achieve the goals laid down in the Constitution, even the institutions of Government can be utilised for adopting anti-people measures.

The constitutional provisions and the laws made thereunder are required to be implemented with commitment to serve the people for whom they are meant. The resources of the country and the development that takes place cannot be arrogated by small sections of the people for themselves. The country can provide the leadership to the developing countries, provided there is a commitment to the goals of our Constitution as contained in Parts III and IV. The political parties with common programme must develop the culture of working together, as the era of coalition is expected to continue. Fight against forces of disruption, obscurantism and fundamentalism, and against poverty and disease and against exploitation, will be long drawn but can be won with confidence in ourselves and in that great endeavour, Parliament should be allowed to play its due role for strengthening the unity and integrity of the country and for accelerating its development for the benefit of the people, the ultimate masters.

Friends, I have no doubt that given the political will and a sensitive, responsive and honest leadership, democracy can provide answers to the multifarious problems that our country is confronted with today. Unless we take the initiatives for placing our democracy on the foundations of equality of our citizens' rights and on the transparency of the entire decision-making processes, the true patrons of our democracy, our people will lose faith in the efficacy of the political system we had adopted after centuries long-struggle against foreign rule. If we fail in achieving that, the sacrifices made by the great men and women, like Bhimsen Sachar and other sagacious and visionary leaders of our freedom movement, would have no meaning for the common people of our country.

Thank you.

LEGISLATURE—JUDICIARY INTERFACE*

I have the honour to welcome you all to this Conference. I sincerely thank each one of you for having made it convenient to attend this Conference at a very short notice. It was only in October 2004 that we had deliberated on the subject of 'Relationship between Legislature and the Judiciary' at the Symposium held alongside our Annual Conference at Kolkata. However, in the wake of the Interim Order passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court on 9 March 2005 in the Jharkhand case, I felt it was my duty as the Speaker of Lok Sabha and as the Chairman of the Conference of Presiding Officers, to call this Emergent Conference as I am of the view that the order has created a disturbing situation having a direct bearing on the relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary affecting the concept of 'Separation of Powers', which is a basic feature of the Constitution, as decided by the Supreme Court itself. I feel that as the custodians of the powers and privileges of our legislative bodies, it becomes incumbent upon us to consider the issue with seriousness and sincerity and to express our concern and to endeavour towards further strengthening the essentially harmonious relations between the two vital pillars of our democracy, namely, the Legislature and the Judiciary.

Let me at the outset make it absolutely clear that the Conference is not at all concerned with the political merits or demerits of what happened in Jharkhand after the recent Assembly elections. For that matter, the issue as such is not confined to the State of Jharkhand alone. It is much broader in content and contours, involving the interpretation of the constitutional provisions regarding the well-established principle of separation of powers among the different organs of the State. The subject in question involves the powers of the Judiciary *vis-a-vis* the powers and privileges of the Legislature, the Speaker and the members of the Legislature.

I believe and I am sure you all will agree that parliamentary democracy draws its sustenance, *inter alia*, from the principle of democratization of responsibilities and powers, as a key to good governance and abhors arbitrariness of any one organ and their working at cross purposes. The distribution of powers, and checks and balances among the various organs of the State constitute one of the characteristic features of a democratic set-up.

* At the inauguration of the Emergent Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India on *Relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary*, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi (20 March 2005).

The greatest challenge before the framers of our Constitution was to ascertain which model of democratic governance would best suit our genius and ground realities so as to ensure good governance and development in the country. It speaks of the farsightedness of our Founding Fathers that they decided upon a unique scheme of governance with a judicious blending of the principle of distribution of powers and the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty in such a manner that we have the best of both, but without the absolute rigidity of either of the two. It is this very postulate that made our Constitution the supreme law of the land, subjecting all the branches of governance to its overriding authority and control.

Each organ of State—the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive—is the creation of the Constitution, and derives its powers from the Constitution and is expected to function in conformity with it. The powers, jurisdiction and responsibilities of each organ and its relationship with one another have been clearly demarcated in purpose, intent and areas of activities, leaving hardly any scope for doubt or confusion. If there is any doubt, there is always the spirit of the Constitution which clearly delineates harmonious relations among the various organs.

What is important here is a proper understanding and appreciation among the different organs about their respective roles and jurisdictions. If any one of them oversteps the assigned limits or displays trends towards that, the stability of the entire edifice could be affected. Here it is pertinent to cite the observations made by Justice Raghava Rao of the Madras High Court in the *A.K. Gopalan Case*, in 1953:

> The powers of each one of the three organs have to be exercised as fundamentally subject to the provisions of the Constitution relating to that organ individually as well as to the provisions relating to other organs... It is the respect that is accorded by one organ of the State to the others that ensures that healthy working of the Constitution which is the acid test of its merits, whatever the paper value of its provisions.

Our Constitution does not envisage unchecked and unbridled powers to any of the organs. Each one of them is supreme in its own sphere and is meant to be so, within the parameters laid down by the Constitution. Being the supreme representative and legislative body, the Legislature has been accorded a pre-eminent position in our political set-up. To mention only a few provisions, the power to make laws, its control over the nation's purse, the Executive being made accountable to the popular House, its role in the election and impeachment of the Head of State as well as in the removal of the incumbents of high offices under the Constitution, its constituent powers,

and its powers during an emergency, testify to the fact of its pre-eminence. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that even the Legislature has to function within the boundaries of its allotted sphere by the Constitution. All the laws, whether Union, State or delegated, are subject to the doctrine of *ultra vires* and, of course, judicial review.

As you all know, the framers of our Constitution had taken utmost care to ensure an independent and impartial Judiciary as an interpreter of the Constitution and the custodian of the rights of the citizens. The courts have the mandate to interpret the law; however, they are not to enter into a discussion as to what the law should be. The scope of judicial review is confined to see whether the impugned legislation falls within the competence of the Legislature or is consistent with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution or other mandatory provisions as provided for in the Constitution. It is a matter of great satisfaction that barring certain occasions, both the Legislature and the Judiciary have consistently functioned within the prescribed limits and in harmony with each other.

It is equally important to keep in mind that the Constitution is a document which acquires life and blood when its provisions are put to practice by different institutions in relation to various forces prevalent in our system. Some time or the other, certain issues which detract from the usual position of harmonious relations are bound to occur, especially in a thriving democracy with multifarious problems like ours. The major issues on which differences between the Legislature and the Judiciary have cropped up over the last five decades, are those relating to the powers of the courts to review the laws passed by the Legislatures, interference in the proceedings of the Legislatures, issues concerning parliamentary privileges and the operation of the Anti-Defection Law and also of the administration of the Legislature Secretariats. Yet, even in dealing with such instances, the centrality of the Constitution has prevailed, which speaks of the efficacy of our constitutional scheme.

As Presiding Officers, you are all well aware that the Legislature is the sole guardian and judge in all matters relating to its proceedings and privileges. Subject to the provisions of the Constitution, in its procedure and conduct of business, each House of the Parliament and that of the State Legislatures is empowered to regulate its own procedure and the conduct of business under Articles 118 and 208, respectively. It is an inherent and exclusive authority and the courts have no power to interfere with such rules or their administration unless there is a contravention of the provisions of the Constitution. It has specifically been provided under Articles 122 and 212 that the validity of any proceedings in Parliament or State Legislatures shall not be called in question on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure. Further it is specifically provided that no officer or member of Parliament/State Legislature in whom powers are vested by the Constitution

for regulating procedure or conduct of business, or for maintaining order, shall be subject to the jurisdiction of any court in respect of the exercise of those powers. Moreover, under Articles 105 and 194, the Constitution guarantees immunity from proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given in the House of the Parliament, Legislature or any Committee thereof. All these constitutional provisions symbolize the supremacy of the Legislature within its own sphere of activity. To my mind, the underlying object behind these powers, privileges and immunities is to protect and preserve the freedom, authority and dignity of the Legislature and its members.

By and large, as per the constitutional mandate, the courts in India have exercised restraint and recognised the immunity of parliamentary proceedings from being called in question in the courts of law. Way back in 1954, in the case of *Raj Narain Singh v. Atmaram Govind Kher*, the Allahabad High Court had held:

> ...this Court is not, in any sense whatever a court of appeal or revision against the Legislature or against the rulings of the Speaker who, as the holder of an office of the highest distinction, has the sole responsibility cast upon him of maintaining the prestige and dignity of the House.
>
> ...this Court has no jurisdiction to issue a writ, direction or order relating to a matter which affected the internal affairs of the House.

In the *M.S.M. Sharma Case of 1960*, the Apex Court had categorically upheld the sovereignty of the Legislature in matters pertaining to the power to conduct its own business. The Supreme Court held:

> The validity of the proceedings inside the Legislature of a State cannot be called in question on the allegation that the procedure laid down by the law had not been strictly followed. No Court can go into the questions which are within the special jurisdiction of the Legislature itself, which has the power to conduct its own business.
>
> The Legislature has the jurisdiction to control the publication of its proceedings and to go into the question whether there has been any breach of its privileges, and the Legislature is vested with complete jurisdiction to carry on its proceedings in accordance with its rules of business. Even though it may not have strictly complied with the requirements of the procedural law laid down for conducting its business, that cannot be a ground for interference by this Court under Article 32 of Constitution. Courts have always recognized the basic difference between complete want of jurisdiction and improper or irregular exercise of jurisdiction. Mere non-compliance with rules of procedure cannot be a ground for issuing a writ under Article 32 of the Constitution.

In 1970, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional guarantee with regard to immunity of parliamentary proceedings in respect of anything said in the House or any Committee thereof and 'anything' has been held to be equivalent to 'everything' in *Tej Kiran Jain v. N. Sanjiva Reddy* (AIR 1970 SC 1573).

The issue whether parliamentary proceedings are immune or not has been further reinforced by the verdict of the Supreme Court relating to the impeachment proceedings of Justice V. Ramaswami (Writ Petition No. 216 of 1993), a Judge of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court held that the Parliament is sovereign with respect to the conduct of its own business and the courts cannot have any say in that. Delivering its judgment in that case, the Court upheld the verdict given by it in the case of *Tej Kiran v. N. Sanjiva Reddy*, (AIR 1970 SC 1573). The Supreme Court held that it is the essence of parliamentary system of Government that people's representatives should be free to express themselves without fear of legal consequences. What they say is only subject to the discipline of the Rules of Procedure, the good sense of the members and the control of proceedings by the Speaker. The courts have no say in the matter and should really have none.

In this context, we may also note the observations made by some of the leading lawyers of our country.

Shri Fali S. Nariman, an eminent member of Parliament and one of the outstanding lawyers of our country, in an article referred to the Order of the Supreme Court dated 9 March 2005 regarding Jharkhand case, has observed as follows:

> This is where the order of the Supreme Court is (with great respect) to be faulted – the delicate balance of powers in our Constitution has been disturbed. To me, the order of March 9 serves as a (disturbing) precedent for courts—in the future—not only the Supreme Court but also any High Court—to direct how proceedings of the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha or State Assemblies should or should not be conducted by its Presiding Officers... Theoretically speaking, the order of March 9 is a sufficient precedent for the Courts (the Supreme Court or any High Court) to direct who should administer oath to members of Parliament, and as to when a Session of Parliament should meet and continue meeting, as to what should be the agenda and as to when directions should be issued for a vote (whether a vote of confidence or otherwise) to be taken on the floor of the Lok Sabha. It would also serve as a precedent for the Courts (including the Supreme Court or any High Court) for issuing directions as to when the result of any vote taken inside the House should be announced. Besides, the order of a Court could take the place of the customary

> summons of the President (to members) as to when the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha is to meet and for what purpose. What was done for a Legislative Assembly could obviously be replicated—for Parliament. This is why a Presidential Reference was called for, particularly because the Supreme Court Order had (unconsciously) overlooked and ignored binding precedents in landmark cases – *Keshav Singh's case* (1975) (Bench of 7 Judges) and in the case of *Kihota Hollohan* (Bench of 5 Judges) : the latter had clearly established that proceedings inside State Legislatures cannot be dictated to by Courts nor called in question by Courts, even when they have not been conducted in accordance with the Rules of Business of the House.... Could the conduct of a judge of the Supreme Court or High Court or their judgments be discussed or criticized inside the House (of a State Legislature or of Parliament). God forbid, no—but why not? Only because of the balancing boundary provision—Article 211 *qua* State Legislatures and Article 121 *qua* Parliament (discussion inside the Houses of any judgment or conduct of any Judge of the Superior Judiciary is constitutionally prohibited). The great organs of the State are by constitutional diktat left supreme in their own respective spheres. That is only because the supreme document of governance,—the document that binds Courts, Parliament and State Legislatures, is above them all;—the Constitution is on a pedestal (as it were) proclaiming to one and all that 'howsoever high you be, the Constitution is above you.'

Shri K.N. Bhat, another leading advocate of the Supreme Court, while referring to the Order of 9 March 2005 has observed as follows:

> By all accounts, the Court took over the functions of the Governor and the Speaker,—in fact, the whole legislative process. Describing this an invasion into the precincts of the House may not be an unpardonable exaggeration... . The Constitution is what the court says it is. The court can declare any action of the Governor or that of the Speaker as being unconstitutional. But can it direct the Speaker to act in a particular manner – say video-record the proceedings and to report to the court? And what if the Speaker refuses to obey?

Shri Rajeev Dhavan, another senior lawyer, in his article published in *The Hindu* on 18 March 2005 has observed as follows:

> No Constitution can function if the autonomy of each of the organs of the Government – the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary – is not respected... . Although the tasks of governance cannot be put in watertight compartments, the Indian Constitution respects the comity

amongst these great institutions by laying down that the courts cannot inquire into the validity of the proceedings of the Legislatures (Articles 122 and 212), the Legislatures cannot discuss the conduct of a judge of the High Court or the Supreme Court except in matters of impeachment (Articles 121 and 211), and the President and Governors enjoy immunity from Court proceedings (Article 361)... . This composite direction of the Supreme Court has given rise to considerable controversy. Speakers are concerned that the Judiciary should not interfere with the internal proceedings of the House and tell them how to conduct its affairs. Suppose the Chief Minister wanted not just a vote but a full-fledged debate? Indeed Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee obtained just that for his ill-fated 13 days' Government in 1996. Was it not for the Governor to adjudge whether the House should be called later in the light of various events... Should the agenda of the Legislature have been determined by the Supreme Court? Could the administration have been ordered to keep order in the House?

According to him:

This raises important issues relating to separation of powers. If the Court felt that something needed to be done, it could have asked the Governor to reconsider the matter. Instead, the Court substituted its own discretion for that of the Governor. Earlier cases from the High Courts of Calcutta (1968), Guwahati (1982), Madras (1989) and Patna (1999) suggest that the Governor's discretion be respected. In the Jharkhand case, the Court's directions were constitutionally invasive of the Legislature's working. These things are not 'judicially manageable'. Suppose the Legislature had not carried out these directions, what would the Court have done? As it happens, Mr. Soren resigned. But suppose he had not ? Would the Court have held a large number of legislators as well as the *pro tem* Speaker in contempt? ... .The famous decision of U.S. Chief Justice John Marshall in the *Marbury Vs. Madison case* in 1804 is reputedly an example of judicial craftsmanship in that the Supreme Court asserted its power without risking its orders not being obeyed. The Judiciary is the custodian of the Constitution and must prevent it from being abused. But if the principles of comity on which the balanced working of the Constitution depends are upset, the authority of the Constitution and its prime custodian may well be hurt in the process. The Supreme Court's orders in the Jharkhand Case should not be treated as a precedent.

I believe that in the Interim Order of 9 March 2005 of the Hon'ble Supreme Court the contours of the area of the supremacy of the Legislature have been blurred. You all are aware of the details and developments of the case. The points of reservations are, in fact, in regard to some basic thrust of the Supreme Court Order which has resulted in the Judiciary entering into the well-defined areas of jurisdiction within the purview of the Legislature. The major issues before us now, that are of grave concern and need serious consideration and resolution are, whether the court has any right to issue directions, as has been done in the present case, for advancing the Session of the Legislature for a vote of confidence; fixing its one-point agenda to have a floor test; directing the *pro tem* Speaker to announce the results faithfully and truthfully; making that the Court's order was to be construed as constituting a notice to the members regarding the meeting of the Assembly; directing the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police to see that all elected members of the Assembly freely, safely and securely attend the Session and no interference or hindrance is caused by anyone therein; and ordering the video-recording of the proceedings with a direction to send a copy of the same to the Court, etc.

To my mind, the order has got serious implications whereby, the contours of the areas of supremacy of the two institutions have got distorted, disturbing the balance of the whole constitutional scheme of governance. With all respect to the Hon'ble Supreme Court, I am of the view that the very principle of separation of powers which is one of the 'basic features' of our governance has been violated. Here, I would like to draw your attention to what Dr. Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar, who along with Sri K.M. Munshi, Dr. B.N. Rau and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar played a prominent role in drafting the provisions relating to the Judiciary, had to say on the matter:

> While there can be no two opinions on the need for the maintenance of judicial independence, both for safeguarding of individual liberty and the proper working of the Constitution, it is also necessary to keep in view one important principle. The doctrine of independence is not raised to the level of a dogma so as to enable the Judiciary to function as a kind of super-Legislature or super-Executive. The Judiciary is there to interpret the Constitution or adjudicate upon the rights between parties concerned.... The Judiciary as much as the Congress (Legislature) and the Executive, is depending for its proper functioning upon the cooperation of the other two.

In this context, some may refer to the order of the Supreme Court in the case of *Jagdambika Pal Vs. Union of India*, AIR 1998 SC 998 in which the Supreme Court ordered a Special Session of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly with the only agenda for conducting a 'Composite Floor-Test' to decide upon the question as to who among the two claimants to the post of

Chief Minister enjoyed the majority support of the House. The Court ordered peaceful conduct of proceedings and that the result of the test be announced by the Speaker faithfully and truthfully. Besides interference with the powers and privileges of the Legislature, the Composite Floor-test was a totally new device created by the Court which, in fact, is the prerogative of the Legislature. The Rules of Procedure of the Legislature nowhere provides for such a test.

However, it may be noted that the Order of the Supreme Court in *Jagdambika Pal's case* was not a speaking order and no reasons were given in support of the same. It does not appear that the attention of the Hon'ble Supreme Court was drawn to the provisions of Article 212 of the Constitution of India nor it appears that any contrary contention was put forward. Thus, very humbly, I submit that such an order cannot be treated as a decision on the entire gamut of the principles of separation of powers, as clearly enshrined in Articles 122 and 212 of the Constitution of India and also of Article 361 thereof or as a precedent. In any event, now that the question has come up before us for consideration, I feel it is our duty to give our serious thought to the same, so that, as responsible constitutional functionaries, we can give our considered view for future harmonious working of different organs of India under the Constitution.

This is not the first time that the relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary concerning these areas is being discussed at the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies. In the past too, the matter has, time and again, been deliberated in one context or the other, always stressing the imperative of cooperative relations between the two institutions. The Conference held in January 1965 deliberated the issue at length and resolved, *inter alia*, that suitable amendments to Articles 105 and 194 should be made in order to make the intention of the Constitution-makers clear beyond doubt so that the powers, privileges and immunities of the Legislatures, their members and Committees could not, in any case, be construed as being subject or subordinate to any other articles of the Constitution.

The matter also came up for discussion at the Emergent Conference of the Presiding Officers held in April 1984. The Conference reiterated the supremacy of the Legislature under the Constitution and the faith in the independence of the Judiciary and resolved *inter alia* that the rules framed under articles 118 and 208 are not subject to scrutiny by any court of law and the provisions regarding their being subject to the constitutional provisions refers to only those regarding Rules of Procedure enshrined in the Constitution and not to any other provisions; that mutual trust and respect must exist between the Legislatures and Courts, each recognizing the independence, dignity and jurisdiction of the other inasmuch as their roles are complementary to each other; and that, if necessary, an amendment might be made in the Constitution so as to place the position beyond all shadow of doubt.

Consequent upon the decision at the Presiding Officers' Conference held in 1993, a Committee of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India was set up under the Chairmanship of Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, the Hon'ble Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, to examine and report on *Measures to Promote Harmonious Relations between the Legislature and the Judiciary*. The Committee had identified four main zones of conflict between the Legislature and the Judiciary, of which interference in the proceedings of the Parliament/Legislatures was one of the issues. Having carefully considered the various aspects involved, the Committee emphasized the need to strengthen the relations between the Legislature and the Judiciary. It was felt that the Constitution has prescribed specific duties and responsibilities to the Legislature and the Judiciary, and their roles are intended to be complementary to each other. The Committee also stressed that it would be in the best interests of democracy if both function with mutual trust and respect, each recognizing the independence, dignity and jurisdiction of the other.

As regards the proceedings of the Parliament/Legislatures, the Committee observed that under Articles 118 and 208, each House of Parliament/State Legislatures has the right to frame rules for regulating, subject to the provisions of the Constitution, its procedure and conduct of its business. In the opinion of the Committee, the question of proceedings of Legislatures in a parliamentary democracy essentially presupposes the supremacy of the Legislatures in their own sphere. Hence, the Legislatures need to have their essential freedom to conduct their business with due dignity, decorum and independence. The Committee, therefore, recommended that subject to the limits stipulated by the Constitution, the Legislatures should have complete freedom in matters of procedure and the conduct of business of their respective Houses. However, the Committee did not take recourse to a blanket opinion that the courts in India should not go into the proceedings of the Legislatures. The Committee observed that in India the Legislature is as much bound by the provisions of the Constitution as the Judiciary is. As per the constitutional system, it is the Legislature that makes the law while the Judiciary interprets them and can also see if the laws are within the ambit of constitutional provisions or not.

In the wake of the Apex Court's orders in the Jharkhand case, my humble but considered view is that we are once again confronted with an unfortunate situation. The issues arising out of the Interim Order of the Supreme Court in the case are of such far-reaching ambit that if not reconsidered and if followed in future, it will upset the constitutional balance and the democratic functioning of the State as a whole. This is a matter which should be looked into transcending all political ideologies and topical developments.

One may raise the question about what could be the possible implementation of the Interim Order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court passed on 9 March 2005. One would like to know that if the Court had considered that if there was a violation of the order, would the Speaker or the members of the Legislature be held guilty of the contempt of the Supreme Court? Would the Judiciary have been able to deal with such a situation? Whether the Speaker could be summoned before the Supreme Court for having exercised his authority under the Constitution of India? Would the Speaker be liable to submit to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court? How would the members of Legislature be treated for alleged contempt of the Court? Would the Supreme Court have directed the arrest and detention of the Speaker and members of the Jharkhand Legislature? As clearly there was disturbance, was it the violation of the order of the Supreme Court on the part of the members of the Legislature against whom no order was issued? Can a Speaker of any Legislature be held answerable for not being able to transact the proceedings of the House, if members of the Legislature indulge in indiscipline only with a view to disturbing the proceedings? The Presiding Officers of the Legislature have their problems in controlling the proceedings and then to be directed by the Court of law to discharge its functions in a given manner, would create wholly unworkable and unacceptable situation. How could the Executive authorities like the Chief Secretary of the State Government or police officials be able to maintain the order, arrange for the presence of the legislators and for their coming inside the House? In effect, if allowed, they would substitute the Presiding Officers in the matter of maintenance of discipline.

Let me once again emphasise here that this Emergent Conference is not and cannot be concerned with the political issues and questions relating to the State of Jharkhand nor is it concerned with the applicability of the Order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 9 March, 2005 insofar as the State Legislative Assembly is concerned. The Order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court was assumed to be binding on the parties to the dispute unless and until the Hon'ble Court decided otherwise. The Conference is and will not be concerned with the merits of any political controversy or with what had happened in Jharkhand prior to or subsequent to the passing of the Order on 9 March 2005.

I had issued a Statement as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha after the meeting, which I held with the Hon'ble Leaders of the Parties on 10 March 2005. It was stated by me, after taking the views of the leaders, who by a preponderant majority expressed gravest concern at the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, that 'the Legislatures should seriously consider the consequences of, what may be termed as, encroachment upon their authority and jurisdiction. It is necessary that the Legislatures' supremacy as enshrined in the Constitution

should be clearly asserted. This is a matter, which should be looked into transcending all political formations and topical developments. As such, I appeal to all to consider the important issue with all seriousness and concern, so that the constitutional balance can be and is restored. In my opinion, as has been suggested by many Hon'ble Leaders, to resolve all questions, the Respected President may be requested to seek the Opinion of the Hon'ble Supreme Court under Article 143 of the Constitution.'

It was strange to say the least, that my statement could have been construed as an interference with the Order of the Supreme Court or having contended for stay or nullification thereof or of inviting anyone to ignore the same. Obviously, the Order would have its effect, whether implementable or not. The reference to seek the advisory opinion of the Hon'ble Supreme Court under Article 143 of the Constitution was mentioned as a possible method of the resolution of the questions raised, as had been suggested by many Hon'ble Leaders. If there was any disrespect shown or intended to be shown to the Hon'ble Supreme Court, which is strongly denied, then obviously, one would not have pleaded for obtaining the opinion of the Hon'ble Supreme Court itself. It is entirely for the Respected Rashtrapatiji, on the advice of the Government, to decide whether to seek such opinion or not. But that does not mean that the question raised is not important or should not be seriously looked into. My appeal to all is to consider this matter dispassionately, only on the basis of the country's constitutional set up without any reference whatsoever to any political controversy, so that one of the most important basic features of our Constitution, namely, 'Separation of Powers' is not disturbed, seriously affecting the balance of powers, as enshrined in the Constitution.

I appeal to all of you to consider the issue detached from all political questions with all seriousness so that the constitutional position is re-affirmed and, in the process, further cement the relationship between the two pillars of our democracy, namely, the Legislature and the Judiciary. I seek your considered views on the matter and I am sure our constitutional scheme will stand to benefit from your words of wisdom.

Thank you.

ARREARS OF COURT CASES : URGENT NEED FOR JUDICIAL REFORMS*

I feel privileged to be here amidst a galaxy of distinguished Judges and legal luminaries and I am thankful to Mr. Parekh and his colleagues in the Supreme Court Bar Association for giving me this opportunity to participate in the Seminar which is being held on the important subject of *Judicial Reforms with Special Reference to the Arrears of Court Cases*. I am sure the Seminar will have discussed and debated the important questions relating to, amongst others, arrears in Court and how best can reforms be made in the Judicial System to tackle this matter of great public concern.

In a parliamentary democracy, the greatest challenge to good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. Effective governance requires effective institutions; and the effectiveness of the institutions—be it the Legislature, the Executive, or the Judiciary—depends on its delivery mechanisms and the framework of supportive rules, regulations and procedures, which need to continuously evolve in response to the changing times and emerging situations. Only then can we expect these institutions to meet their stated objectives and fulfill their assigned roles in discharging the responsibilities in the affairs of the State and the society.

In our constitutional set-up, the Judiciary has been rightly accorded the pre-eminent role and is one of the three important organs of the State with powers and jurisdiction laid down in the Constitution itself. To quote Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, 'The Judiciary occupies, amongst the trinity, the highest place in people's conscience and confidence'. The independence of the Judiciary is the cornerstone of our democracy and Rule of Law and judicial independence are intimately inter-connected and one gets sustenance from the other. We have vested interest in maintaining and sustaining a strong and an independent Judiciary.

We are proud that our Judiciary has to a large measure succeeded in preserving, protecting and promoting the rights of the citizens and it has earned the admiration of the people in the discharge of its onerous obligations

* At the All India Seminar on *Judicial Reforms with Special Reference to Arrears of Court Cases*, New Delhi (30 April 2005).

of enforcing the Rule of Law. This country has had many extraordinary and brilliant Judges known for their integrity and commitment to the basic principles and the eternal values of our Constitution.

However, the effectiveness and credibility of our Judicial System depends on not only doing what is just and proper while disposing of a matter but upon the development of a proper justice delivery system, which will effectively preserve, protect and promote the rights of the citizens and at the same time provide justice in its true sense of the term. It is a truism to say that justice should neither be denied nor delayed but the very fact that at this high level, we are still discussing the question of arrears in Courts and of the necessity of judicial reforms to deal with the same, clearly establishes that our judicial system has not yet been able to meet fully with the aspirations of the people and their needs and various problems have become almost entrenched in the system.

This is not the first time that a Seminar or Symposium is being held to find out ways and means to deal with arrears in Courts. Mounting cases and slow movement of the judicial process make for a distressing scenario and in many cases, unfortunately, delaying justice has amounted to denying justice. Nani Palkhiwala had lamented once saying that, 'If I were asked to mention the greatest drawback of the administration of justice in India today, I would say that it is delay. There are inordinate delays in the disposal of cases... I am not aware of any country in the world where litigation goes on for as long a period as in India. Our cases drag over a length of time which makes eternity intelligible. The law may or may not be an ass, but in India it is certainly a snail and our cases proceed at a pace which would be regarded as unduly slow in a community of snails. Justice has to be blind but I see no reason why it should also be lame: here it just hobbles along, barely able to walk'.

For decades, various well-meaning people and bodies have expressed concern in the matter of the slow progress in the process of trial and disposal of cases. More than twenty-five years ago, the Supreme Court in *Hussainara Khatoon Vs. State of Bihar*, observed that 'Speedy trial is of essence to criminal justice and there can be no doubt that the delay in trial by itself constitutes denial of justice'. Unfortunately the problem has only aggravated over the last quarter of the century and I am sure everyone agrees that gross delay in justice delivery is tantamount to undermining the concept of the Rule of Law itself. Along with the legal fraternity and others, members of Parliament have also expressed grave concern at the unreasonable delay in the administration of justice, which, according to them, constitutes unconscionable denial of justice. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs deliberated on the subject and in its 85th Report on *Law's Delays : Arrears in*

Courts, presented in the year 2001 has also referred to the magnitude of the problem. It has taken note of the fact that more than 35 lakhs cases were pending in the various High Courts, out of which nearly six lakhs cases were pending for more than ten years. The Committee further found that over twenty million cases were pending in the District and Subordinate Courts. To a question answered in Parliament on 21 March 2005, the Government has stated that the total number of pending cases in various High Courts stood at 36,48,475, and out of them, 6,54,206 cases were pending for more than ten years. On the positive side, the pendency of cases in the Supreme Court has been reduced from nearly one lakh in 1991 to twenty nine thousand in 2004 but quite a large number of cases are pending for 5, 10 or 20 years.

One of the methods which has been adopted for the last few years is to set up what are called Fast Track Courts to speedily dispose of pending criminal cases which are assigned to them. The Minister for Law and Justice in an answer to a question put in the Lok Sabha yesterday has stated that 1,562 Fast Track Courts, so far made functional, have disposed of 7.87 lakhs cases out of 14.33 lakhs cases assigned to them, which shows the seriousness of the problem. We are informed that these Courts are due to continue for a further period of five years, that is up to 3 March, 2010.

We are all aware that the problem has assumed almost intractable proportion. Even in 1986, Chief Justice P.N. Bhagwati had observed that 'the judicial system is creaking under the weight of arrears'. Though many well-meaning suggestions and solutions have been offered, the problem still continues and in an aggravated form, while no real solution has been achieved, as most of the suggestions have remained only on paper for reasons one can visualise.

Amongst the various causes, which are usually mentioned, are the delay in filling up of vacancies in Courts, inadequate number of Judicial Officers, substantial increase in fresh institution of cases (which no doubt include a large number of frivolous cases), increased awareness on the part of the citizens, dilatory tactics of some lawyers, lawyers' strikes, litigants seeking repeated adjournments, under-equipped Courts, infrastructural inadequacies, cumbersome procedures leading to prolonged litigations, new legislations, increase in trade, commerce and socio-economic matters, a vast body of legislative and administrative matters touching upon the life of the citizens, etc.

I would not venture to identify which, if at all, are the real causes and would not add up to the list nor can suggest any final or totally effective remedy except, to submit humbly that all concerned with the justice delivery system will have to work together with sincerity and commitment, keeping the common man's interest in mind to find time-bound solutions.

We have been talking for years about various types of reforms—judicial reforms, electoral reforms and now economic reforms and others. But ordinary citizens wonder—'reforms for whom'? Without a people oriented approach and without the common people being the intended beneficiary, what is the purpose of reform—one may properly ask. The talk of reform should not be a matter of intellectual exercise only. However well-meaning it may be, we must test every proposal for reform in whichever area it may be, in the touchstone of benefit to the common people. Therefore, to my mind the concept of judicial reform has to have a pro-people content, otherwise hardly it will have any result, and hence, hardly any popular support.

One may ask with all humility, and in fact the people are asking, as to what has been or is being done to reach justice to the common people, for reducing the costs of litigation, to minimize the difficulty of access to the Courts by the common people, especially those living in the rural areas and far-flung places. What is the good of having judicial reforms if the people are not able to approach the Court and not have their matters taken up by competent lawyers at affordable costs and have their cases disposed of within a reasonable time?

Should we not ask ourselves how can a common man, a dismissed worker or a peasant uprooted from its land or a school teacher or an oppressed woman approach the courts of law, for justice? The cost of litigation, the fees of successful lawyers and even the expenses of initiating the dispute redressal system are beyond the reach of most of the common people who seek justice. Like others, I have had some humble experience how it was and is almost impossible for many oppressed people even to approach the Court, far less getting competent legal advice which are beyond their reach, as the Courts themselves are. If I am not misunderstood and with all humility and apology to all the distinguished Judges, for whom I have the highest respect, all proposals for having Circuit Benches of the Supreme Court in different parts of the country have been found to be unacceptable. As it is understood, the move has been met with the disapproval on the ground that such Benches would affect the integrity and unitary character of the Court and would lead to unsettled jurisdiction. Similarly, the proposals for setting up Benches of High Courts for the States have been resisted by a section of the Bench and the Bar. The demand for Benches in different cities so far as the Hon'ble Supreme Court is concerned and in different areas of a State so far as High Courts are concerned is not primarily for proliferation of cases but only to provide easy access to the common people to the temples of justice.

I must confess that I am a votary of setting up the Circuit Benches of our Apex Court at least in the different metropolitan cities and suitable number of Benches of the State High Courts at appropriate places in the States

concerned. According to me, this is a prime necessity if we really think of providing justice to the people and it should be an essential part of judicial reform. I do not believe that such Benches will necessarily add to more arrears but at least it will provide satisfaction to a citizen of the country who feels that justice is elusive for him because he cannot actually approach the Court because of inaccessibility, so far as he is concerned due to distance, cost and time involved, to the High Court or ultimately to the Supreme Court.

One of the reasons, which has often been stated for accumulation of arrears, is vacancies in different High Courts. The Minister for Law and Justice in his intervention made yesterday in Lok Sabha mentioned that when the present Government at the Centre came into power, there were more than 300 vacancies, out of which 110 vacancies so far have been filled in one year and that 10 new Chief Justices have also been appointed and he observed that 'the problem is that the vacancies are not filled up in time'. May I ask with all humility: who is responsible and ultimately accountable for non-filling of the vacancies? Why should litigants suffer for delay in the filling-up of the vacancies? Who is responsible for the delay in actual disposal of the cases? Why adjournments are sought for or are granted? What steps are taken to remove the infrastructural inadequacies? These questions are hardly answered. In any event, no one in authority is in a disadvantaged position because of the inadequacies or imperfections in the system.

To save the entire edifice of justice delivery system, now Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR) mechanism is being thought of and is being gradually introduced. Yesterday, the Hon'ble Minister of Law and Justice said in Lok Sabha that a movement has picked up in the country about the alternative dispute resolution and he said, 'it was so encouraging that the Judges, Lawyers and Legislators frankly discussed (at a Seminar recently held in West Bengal) that the conciliation method which is in the ethos of our country should be adopted in the country. There is no use of taking the poor people to litigation. We would try to resolve their dispute locally with the help of conciliation and mediation and that experiment has been started from West Bengal. I would like that the country should follow their tradition and will like to promote it in whatever way we can'. He further observed that 'if this conciliation method starts in the country, most of the problems of the rural poor will be resolved. We will give incentive and legal aid also wherever necessary. But without conciliation and mediation, regular courts will not be able to grapple with the arrears. This consensus is reached by all the Chief Ministers and the Chief Justices. Regular courts cannot grapple with the arrears. So, we will have to adopt ADR method'. I would humbly urge all concerned to consider this matter in right earnest and with seriousness.

In this context, the Lok Adalats, which were given statutory recognition under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 and the Fast Track Courts, conceived recently, assume great importance. By providing speedy and inexpensive justice, the Lok Adalats have played a pivotal role in reducing the burden on the Courts. Even here, one notices unfortunately a lot of opposition and protest on the part of a section of the lawyers.

It is obvious that the confidence of the people in the justice-delivery system is an essential prerequisite for the very survival of democracy. The loss of that confidence can lead to instability and threaten the very essence of democracy. I consider that judicial reforms, as an essential component for strengthening democracy, should be upper-most in the minds of all concerned, so that effective action is taken which will instill a sense of confidence amongst the people. I am sure that the discussions in the Seminar will provide the necessary fillip towards making efforts to bring about reforms in the right direction. We have great and eminent Judges and extremely competent lawyers and if both the Bench and the Bar act in unison they can play the most vital role in restoring the faith of the people in the system, facilitating Rule of Law and good governance in the country.

I once again compliment the Supreme Court Bar Association and its very able President and other Office bearers on organizing this Seminar and I am extremely grateful to them for giving me the opportunity to place some of my views for the consideration of the august gathering.

Thank you.

CONSTITUTIONAL SCHEME OF CHECKS AND BALANCES*

I deem it a privilege to be here today to deliver the Second Nani Palkhivala Memorial Lecture on a very topical theme, "The Scheme of Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances in the Constitution". I am grateful to the Bar Association of India for extending this honour to me.

At the outset, I would like to pay my humble tributes to Late Nani Ardeshir Palkhivala, the distinguished jurist and legal luminary, whose sterling contributions added a new dimension to our constitutional jurisprudence. His was indeed a many-splendoured personality: outstanding lawyer, constitutional expert, specialist in finance and tax laws, human rights activist, learned professor, respected educationist, renowned author, orator *non pareil*, corporate leader, eminent diplomat – the list is endless. More importantly, he was the epitome of humaneness, humility and unfailing courtesy, and a moral force in our public life. Nani Palkhivala has a pride of place in the country's legal firmament. In fact, the legal fraternity acknowledges him as one among the best in the world. He was a colossus among the legal community and was renowned for his passionate advocacy of numerous public causes.

A champion of constitutional and human rights, Palkhivala displayed an unwavering commitment to democracy, Rule of Law and ethical values in public life. Endowed with exceptional articulation, profound scholarship and a luminous intellect, he did not confine his remarkable oratorical skills to legal matters alone. He spoke on a wide variety of subjects, which ranged from the spiritual to the temporal. His much acclaimed budget analysis and the public lectures on it were events that people across the country used to look forward to.

Nani Palkhivala was also a prolific author. *We, the People*, and *We, the Nation*, which stand out among his several publications, enunciate his profound views on a range of public issues which he passionately espoused during his life. Another of his works, *Our Constitution Defaced and Defiled* sought to instill in the citizens the spirit of liberty and democracy and

* At the Second Nani Palkhivala Memorial Lecture on *The Scheme of Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances in the Constitution* organised by the Bar Association of India, New Delhi (12 May 2005).

awareness of their constitutional rights. Kanga and Palkhivala's treatise on Income Tax Law, was the acknowledged authoritative publication on the complex legislation. Two of his publications, *India's Priceless Heritage and Essential Unity of all Religions*, show how a man of law delved deeply into the realm of spirituality as well. His writings covered a wide gamut of issues dear to his heart and he articulated his concerns with exceptional lucidity. National integration, religious and social harmony and development of the country on modern lines were among his consistent concerns. Underlying these he once said:

> National integration is born in the hearts of the citizens. When it dies there, no army, no Government, no Constitution, can save it. States of mind precede States. Inter-faith harmony and consciousness of the essential unity of all religions is at the very heart of our national integration.

Honoured with Padma Vibhushan and a number of other awards and honours from India and abroad, Nani Palkhivala had wide-ranging interests and activities. He has left an indelible imprint of his multifaceted personality on every area he was associated with. His many contributions were vividly brought out in the Citation presented to him by the Lawrence University in Wisconsin:

> As India's leading author, scholar, teacher and practitioner of constitutional law, you have defended the individual, be he prince or pauper, against the State; you have championed free speech and an unfettered press; you have protected the autonomy of the religious and educational institutions of the minorities, you have fought for the preservation of independent social organizations and multiple centers of civic power ... you have battled stifling economic controls and bureaucratic red tape. You have always believed that even in a poor and developing country the need for bread is fully compatible with the existence of liberty ...You have given unstintingly of your time and wealth to strengthen the roots of Indian democracy ...You are also an enlightened patriot and nationalist.

That was what the people and the world at large thought of Nani Palkhivala.

One of Palkhivala's abiding concerns was Rule of Law as enshrined in our Constitution and from this emerged his utmost commitment to constitutional proprieties. He had an unfathomable respect for and great pride in the Constitution of India. He fully realized the importance of preserving and protecting its cardinal values and exalted virtues and he spared no efforts in this regard. He fought many celebrated legal battles in

the highest Court of law to secure and safeguard what he believed was the correct constitutional premise. That is why, I felt that I could pay my humble tribute to him by speaking on a topic, which is at the very core of our constitutional set up, for this Memorial Lecture here this evening.

One of the characteristic features of several constitutional systems across the world is the doctrine of separation of powers providing for the functions of the three primary organs of State – the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary—to be carried out by separate bodies. The system envisages an Executive with governing powers; an elected Legislature with the three main functions of representing popular will, enforcing the accountability of the Government and making laws; and the Judiciary, to administer civil and criminal justice—both between private persons, and between private persons and the State. It also entails that none of these organs should be vested with absolute or unbridled powers, so that no organ or individual assumes power of despotic proportions.

The doctrine of separation of powers can be traced as far back as the Aristotelian times. In later centuries, John Locke and James Harrington had advocated this principle. The credit for a meaningful and concrete concept of separation of powers, however, goes to the eighteenth century French philosopher Baron de Montesquieu, who wrote in his *Spirit of Laws* thus:

> When the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person or in the same Magistrates or body, there can be no liberty. Again, there is no liberty if the judicial power is not separated from the legislative and executive powers. Were it joined with the legislative power, the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control; for the judge would then be the legislator. Were it joined with the executive power, the judge might behave with violence and oppression. There would be an end of everything were the same man or the same body to exercise these three powers.

Montesquieu's writings considerably influenced the views and thoughts of the framers of the Constitution of the United States when they gathered to draft the American Constitution. Thomas Jefferson, one of their Founding Fathers and the third President of the US, was an ardent proponent of the doctrine of separation of powers in the context of governmental functioning. About sixty years before the American Constitution was drafted, the British had, introduced in 1688, the Bill of Rights, one of the characteristic features of which was the separation of powers between the King and the Parliament and the King and the common law courts. The makers of the American Constitution adopted the concept and fitted it into their written Constitution.

In the Indian context, the concept of separation of powers and checks and balances is inherent in the constitutional arrangements. In fact, 'Separation of Powers' has now been acknowledged as among the 'basic features' of our Constitution. All the three organs of the State, the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary are bound by and subject to the Constitution. None of them has powers beyond the Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar also pointed out during the debates in the Constituent Assembly that a Constitution is based on certain tacit assumptions concerning the fundamentals; for example, no Constitution lays down that the Executive is bound to carry out the laws made by the Legislature. It is assumed that they will perform that duty. Likewise no Constitution lays down that none of the organs, including the Judiciary, must exceed its powers.

We have put in place a judicious blend of distribution of powers and parliamentary sovereignty. In our scheme of things, the three organs of State are the creations of the Constitution; their powers, jurisdictions, responsibilities and relationship with one another have been clearly demarcated in purpose, intent and areas of activity. Although there are some departures from the classical federal pattern, our Founding Fathers also had made it clear that it was a Federation that they were seeking to establish. Within their own sphere, the States have a guaranteed autonomy. The cardinal principle of democracy is that power vests in as well as emanates from the people; as such, accountability to the people in its entirety holds the key to the success and sustenance of democracy in its varied manifestations.

After we attained freedom, the biggest challenge before the Founding Fathers was to evolve a system of governance which would best serve the nation—with diverse languages, culture, religions and stages of development, coming out of foreign subjugation after centuries—in consonance with our traditions and values. The visionaries who were entrusted with the drafting of the Constitution of free India, crafted a unique scheme of governance in which parliamentary democracy was cemented as the corner-stone of our constitutional edifice in preference to the presidential system. They also amalgamated the principle of separation of powers with the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty in such a manner that we have the benefit of both, yet without the rigidity of the two systems.

The obvious consideration before the Constituent Assembly was to preserve and protect the supremacy of the sovereign will of the people in our governance structure. It is this very postulate that made the Constitution, the supreme law of the land, subjecting all the organs of State to its overriding authority. The centrality of the will of the people finds its best expression in the Preamble itself, which also is the very source of all institutions of

governance. The words 'We, the People of India' and 'do hereby Adopt, Enact and Give to Ourselves this Constitution' recognize the sovereignty of the people and their primacy in our constitutional system and convey its eternal message. It is in exercise of this sovereign power that we, the people, have given unto ourselves the Constitution making India a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic. And, through the provisions of the Constitution, we have enumerated the powers and responsibilities of the organs of the State to be the facilitators of national weal.

It is axiomatic to say that each organ of the State—the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive—is required to function in conformity with it. The relationship of the organs with one another has been clearly demarcated in purpose, intent and areas of activities, leaving hardly any scope for doubt or confusion. If there is any doubt, there is always the spirit of the Constitution which clearly delineates harmonious relations among the various organs. That being so, it is always of the utmost importance that all the organs of State work in harmony and in tandem and does not encroach into each other's area of jurisdiction. If any organ oversteps the constitutionally assigned limits or even displays a trend toward that, each one of them suffers and in such case, the ultimate casualty is the constitutional balance and thereby national interest. By and large, the scheme of governance, as constitutionally ordained has worked well in our country; yet, there have been occasional disputes centering around different issues and subjects which have been perceived to have created doubts about the capacity of our constitutional set up to deal with such situations satisfactorily. Even in dealing with such instances, the centrality of the Constitution should prevail, so that the efficacy of our constitutional scheme is maintained under all circumstances.

As the supreme representative and law-making body, the Legislature has been accorded a pre-eminent position in our constitutional and political set-up. The power to make laws, its control over the nation's purse, the Executive being made accountable to the popular House, its role in the election and impeachment of the Head of State as well as in the removal of incumbents of high constitutional offices, its constituent powers, and its powers during an emergency testify to such pre-eminence. Yet, even the Legislature has to function within the confines as laid down by the Constitution.

All the laws, whether Union, State or delegated, are subject to the doctrine of *ultra vires* and judicial review. It is thus that the framers of our Constitution took utmost care to provide for an independent and impartial Judiciary as an interpreter of the Constitution and the custodian of the rights of the citizens. However, they envisioned that the courts too have the mandate only to interpret the laws and not to enter into a discussion as to what the law

should be nor to lay down general norms of behaviour for the Government and the people to be considered binding on all as the law of the land. The scope of judicial review thus is confined to see whether the impugned legislation falls within the competence of the Legislature or is consistent with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution and its other mandatory provisions. The Constitution does not contemplate a super-organ nor confers over-riding authority on any organ. No organ has any authority to superintend over the exercise of powers and functions of another, unless the Constitution strictly so permits, otherwise the constitutional balance will be greatly disturbed.

The basic foundation of our Constitution is the accountability of the State to the people who are the real masters. The accountability of the Executive to the people at large is enforced through their representatives in the House of People. The Legislatures also have the obligation not to exceed the jurisdictional limits provided in our organic law. The Constitution and its Preamble are the guiding lights so far as the Judiciary is concerned but there is no scope of enforcing its accountability to the Constitution, except judicial conscience and rectitude. If any organ of the State arrogates to itself any power, having a sanction only in *terrorem*, which under the constitutional scheme belongs to any other organ, it will cause a serious imbalance in our constitutional set-up.

The supremacy of the Constitution, parliamentary democracy, the principle of separation of powers, the independence of the Judiciary and the limited amending powers of Parliament, etc. have been spelt out, at different times, as among the basic features of the Constitution. What is important in this context is that all organs of State have to judiciously look at different perceptions of specific issues and ensure that the constitutional mandate is not violated. They also have to make efforts to strengthen the linkages between the two organs since if either of the organs gets weakened, the stability of the entire edifice of our democratic structure would be in jeopardy.

As per the constitutional provisions, the Parliament and State Legislatures have duly showed the highest respect and regard for the judicial body. The Rules of Procedure ensure that the image of the Judiciary is not tarnished in any way by any action of our Legislative Bodies. In fact, there has always been a consensus among the community of parliamentarians to strike a balance among the various organs of State so as to enhance the prestige and dignity of the institutions of our polity.

As per the system of checks and balances, each of the three branches would find itself controlled by the other two if it abused its powers while all

three of them would be controlled by an alert, vigilant and assertive, sovereign from whom all power is derived in the last resort, that is, the people who constitute the great Indian nation.

Article 361 Clause (1) says: 'The President, or the Governor or Rajpramukh of a State, shall not be answerable to any court for the exercise and performance of the powers and duties of his office or for any act done or purporting to be done by him in the exercise and performance of those powers and duties.' The Constitution explicitly bars the Legislature, Union as well as State, from discussing the conduct of any Judge in the discharge of his duties except on a Motion for his impeachment. It, likewise, bars the courts from questioning any alleged irregularity of procedure in the Legislature. Articles 121 and 122 of the Constitution are explicit. Under Article 121, 'No discussion shall take place in Parliament with respect to the conduct of any Judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court in the discharge of his duties except upon a motion for presenting an address to the President praying for the removal of the Judge... .' Further, Article 122(1)says: 'The validity of any proceedings in Parliament shall not be called in question on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure.' And Article 122 (2) says: 'No officer or member of Parliament in whom powers are vested by or under this Constitution for regulating procedure or the conduct of business, or for maintaining order, in Parliament shall be subject to the jurisdiction of any court in respect of the exercise by him of those powers.'

There are identical provisions in respect of the State Legislatures in Articles 211 and 212. It may be noticed that the Constitution does not stop at merely debarring an inquiry into the legislative process. It goes further in Clause 2 and says that the Presiding Head of the Legislature shall not be subject to the jurisdiction of any court in respect of the exercise by him of his powers to regulate procedure or the conduct of business or to maintain order. Nothing could have been more explicit.

When we speak of separation of powers, it is imperative that we keep in mind and advert to the respective roles and jurisdictions among the organs of State, and that any overstepping of the assigned limits or even trends towards that could affect the stability of our constitutional scheme. As Justice Raghava Rao observed in 1953:

> The powers of each one of the organs have to be exercised as fundamental, subject to the provisions of the Constitution relating to that organ individually as well as to the provisions relating to other organs... . It is the respect that is accorded by one organ of the State to the others that ensures that healthy working of the Constitution which is the acid test of its merits, whatever the paper value of its provisions.

Similarly, commenting on the nature of separation of powers delineated by our Constitution, the Supreme Court, in *Ram Jawaya Kapur v. State of Punjab* (AIR 1955 SC 549), observed:

> The Indian Constitution has not indeed recognized the doctrine of separation of powers in its absolute rigidity, but the functions of the different parts or branches of Government have been sufficiently differentiated and consequently it can very well be said that our Constitution does not contemplate assumption, by one organ or part of the State, of functions that essentially belong to another.

To my mind, the Rule of Law is at the very core of our Constitution. It should permeate the way in which we are governed. It requires that those who exercise powers, should be conditioned by law, and not be allowed to act in an arbitrary or unlawful manner so that the people can obtain the protection of law as and when required. It is only to guard against the abuse of powers that a constitutional structure of power-relationship with checks and balances was devised and safeguards provided for under our Constitution, whether expressly or by implication.

By and large, the Courts in India have exercised restraint and recognised the immunity of parliamentary proceedings from being called in question in the Courts of law. Way back in 1954, in the case of *Raj Narain Singh v. Atmaram Govind Kher*, the Allahabad High Court had held:

> ...this Court is not, in any sense whatever, a Court of appeal or revision against the Legislature or against the rulings of the Speaker who, as the holder of an office of the highest distinction, has the sole responsibility cast upon him of maintaining the prestige and dignity of the House ... this Court has no jurisdiction to issue a writ, direction or order relating to a matter which affected the internal affairs of the House.

Again, in the *M.S.M. Sharma Case of 1960* (AIR SC 1960), the Apex Court upheld the sovereignty of the Legislature in matters pertaining to the power to conduct its own business and in *Tej Kiran Jain v. N. Sanjiva Reddy* (AIR 1970 SC 1573), the Supreme Court further reiterated the constitutional guarantee with regard to immunity of parliamentary proceedings in respect of anything said in the House or any Committee thereof and 'anything' has been held to be equivalent to 'everything'.

The immunity of parliamentary proceedings from judicial scrutiny was further reinforced by the verdict of the Supreme Court in the matter relating to the impeachment proceedings of Justice v. Ramaswami, the then Judge of the Supreme Court (Writ Petition No. 216 of 1993). The Apex Court held that

the Parliament is sovereign with respect to the conduct of its own business and the Courts cannot have any say in that. In this case also, the Supreme Court had held that it is the essence of parliamentary system of Government that people's representatives should be free to express themselves without fear of legal consequences. It also held that what they say is only subject to the discipline of the Rules of Procedure, the good sense of the members and the control of proceedings by the Speaker.

Notwithstanding the constitutional arrangements separating the powers of the Legislature and the Judiciary thereby making them independent in their functioning, there have been occasions when the different organs differed in their perceptions of the constitutional scheme, in some occasions involving the powers and the domain of the Legislature and the Judiciary. Here it would be appropriate to mention some of the major instances of disagreement between the Legislature and the Judiciary, so that one could view those cases in the context of the constitutional scheme of separation of powers and checks and balances.

The Jagadambika Pal case of 1998, involving the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly and the Jharkhand Assembly case of 2005, to my mind, point to the deviations from the generally understood constitutional scheme of separation of powers. Many perceived the concept of 'composite floor-test' introduced by the Supreme Court in the 1998 and 2005 cases, as an avoidable interference with the powers and privileges of the Legislature by the Judiciary.

I respectfully reiterate that in the Jharkhand Assembly case, the Supreme Court gave an unfortunate non-speaking order, which, to my mind, violates Article 212 in several respects. I pointed out then and I would like to repeat here that if the Assembly had ignored or flouted the order, the Supreme Court would have been confronted with a most embarrassing situation in which it would have been unable to secure the enforcement of its order, thus undermining the authority and prestige of the Court. It may be noticed that the order of the Supreme Court could not actually resolve the problem which was possible only by Executive intervention.

In fact, the order of the Supreme Court in that case could not be implemented because of the situation prevailing in the Assembly. If it was treated as a violation of the order, would the Speaker or the members of the Legislature be held guilty of contempt of the Supreme Court? Would the Judiciary have been able to deal with such a situation? Could the Speaker be summoned before the Supreme Court for having exercised his authority under the Constitution of India? Would the Speaker be liable to submit to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court? How would the members of the Legislature be treated for alleged contempt of the Court? Would the Supreme Court have directed the arrest and detention of the Speaker and members of the Jharkhand

Legislature? For the disturbance that took place, was that a violation of the order of the Supreme Court on the part of the members of the Legislature against whom no order was issued? Can a Speaker of any Legislature be held answerable for not being able to transact the proceedings of the House, if members of the Legislature indulge in indiscipline only with a view to disturb the proceedings?

For the Presiding Officers of the Legislatures, to be directed by the Court of law to discharge their functions in a given manner, would create a wholly unworkable and unacceptable situation. How could the Executive authorities like the Chief Secretary of the State Government or police officials be able to maintain the order, arrange for the presence of the legislators and for their coming inside the House? If this was allowed, would they have not been substituting for the Presiding Officers in the matter of maintenance of discipline?

The interim order of the Supreme Court in these two cases, to my mind, upset the delicate constitutional balance between the Judiciary and the Legislature. I feel that these were instances of unfortunate and serious encroachment by the Supreme Court on well-demarcated areas of powers of the Legislatures. It, in effect, blurred the contours of areas of supremacy of different constitutional institutions. Articles 122 and 212 of the Constitution explicitly symbolize the supremacy of the Legislatures within their own spheres, and these provisions are equally binding on the Speakers as well as on all courts.

I very much hope that the Supreme Court will one day, before long, review its order and set it aside as it has done in similar situations in the past. The Supreme Court enjoys a place of esteem and honour in the minds of the people of India. Needles to say, its independence and integrity are indispensable to democratic governance under the Constitution.

In this context, I am tempted to draw your attention to another matter which pertains to what is called 'judicial activism' which has gained ground in recent years, eliciting both admiration and criticism from various quarters. Personally, I proudly acknowledge the great contribution made by our Judiciary in providing justice through this innovative system to the oppressed citizens, especially those belonging to the vulnerable sections of the community who have no means, no facilities and, in fact, no possibility on their own to approach the Court even in cases of glaring injustice and discrimination. But, have we not travelled a long way from that objective? On many occasions, the Hon'ble Supreme Court itself has felt it necessary to condemn motivated and frivolous approaches to court in the garb of Public Interest Litigation. In almost all courts, there appear to be one or two self-appointed protectors

of civil rights who are thriving in initiating Public Interest Litigations in the name of doing public good.

There is a feeling that in this process there is not only proliferation of cases but also near obliteration of the contours of the specific jurisdictions of the different organs of the State for which the Doctrine of Separation of Powers has been clearly engrafted in our Constitution. Such assumption of jurisdiction has inhibited many well-meaning executive authorities from discharging their functions according to their judgment and obligation. I humbly submit that disposal of matters may be well left to those on whom Constitution has imposed obligations and for which, in the ultimate analysis, they are accountable to the people. Discharge of executive responsibilities by any other authority, howsoever highly placed, but non-accountable, is nothing but arrogation of the authority to govern – a task clearly assigned to the Executive. Some of the judicial interventions are not even instances of judge-made laws but are nothing but discharging executive function, which cannot be called into question by anybody, if they are decided by the Apex Court and have to be enforced in spite of their undesirability from the point of view of those, who are entrusted with the duty to govern. To my mind, it would be desirable if the Judiciary, in the name of public good, does not enter into an arena, which the Constitution has assigned for others. With all humility, one can say that there should be no assumption that any particular organ has a monopoly of concern for the people. Such a notion itself will be an anathema to our constitutional set-up and the letter and spirit of our organic law.

Rule of law has to be enforced not by expanding any organ's extent of powers, by encroaching into the areas specifically assigned to any other, but by diligently and effectively discharging each one's assigned responsibilities. It is from this premise that we have to look at the public perception about the functioning of institutions of governance. I do agree that there is a great deal of cynicism among our people about the way our institutions function, particularly about the Parliament and the agencies that are meant to deliver the fruits of governance to our people—meaning thereby the administration provided by the Executive. Many a time—the Judiciary is applauded for its interventions in forcing the arm of the Executive to do certain things or in restraining it from doing certain things. People appreciate it. But at what cost are they doing it? How about the inordinate delay in the justice-delivery system of the country ? We are forced to reckon with huge arrears in court cases, running into millions. While agreeing that the Executive can play a role in addressing the problems, the Judiciary need to ask itself—to whom it is accountable? What are the constitutional and legal sanctions behind their assuming certain jurisdictions beyond the scheme intended by the Constitution?

Here, I would like to remind ourselves of what Dr. Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar who, along with Shri K.M. Munshi, Dr. B.N. Rau and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, played a prominent role in drafting the constitutional provisions relating to the Judiciary, had to say on the matter:

> While there can be no two opinions on the need for the maintenance of judicial independence, both for safeguarding of individual liberty and the proper working of the Constitution, it is also necessary to keep in view one important principle. The doctrine of independence is not raised to the level of a dogma so as to enable the Judiciary to function as a kind of super-Legislature or super-Executive. The Judiciary is there to interpret the Constitution or adjudicate upon the rights between parties concerned.... The Judiciary as much as the Congress (Legislature) and the Executive, is dependent for its proper functioning upon the cooperation of the other two.

In the interest of harmonius functioning, I believe that no one organ of the State should usurp the functions which essentially belong to another, nor should it abdicate its essential functions and thereby upset the well-cherished principles of separation of powers and checks and balances provided by our Constitution. This, to my mind, is the essence of the classical tenet of separation of powers and checks and balances. With due regard to the authority and dignity of all the three organs of State, I would like to emphasise that each one of them must appreciate the other's role in the right perspective and in consonance with the spirit of the Constitution. If these organs work at cross purposes, it would not only disturb the delicate constitutional balance in their very functioning, but also create hurdles in the democratic governance of the country.

The principles of parliamentary democracy are based on the affirmation that the people 'are the only keepers of the Constitution'. The institutions of governance, as provided for in the Constitution are accountable to the Constitution as also to the people. A Constitution, on its own, is only a document, but it acquires life when the people who are entrusted to work it, operate its many provisions with care. As my learned friend, Fali Nariman, has rightly observed: 'Constitutions do not work on their own. They are inert. They require human beings to work them.' We, the people who are to work the Constitution, then, have to give life to it in letter and spirit. The problem comes when different individuals with varying perceptions work the Constitution. Pattabhi Sitaramayya poignantly spoke of this in the Constituent Assembly:

> Finally, let me ask you—'What after all is a Constitution?' It is a grammar of politics, if you like, it is a compass to the political mariner.

> However good it may be, by itself it is inanimate, it is insensitive, and it cannot work by itself ... everything depends upon the manner in which we approach it, whether we observe the letter and ignore the spirit or whether we observe both the letter and the spirit in equal measure... It depends upon how we work it.

Emphasizing this point from a different perspective, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar spoke of the role of the people and the political parties in injecting life into a Constitution:

> ...However good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot. The working of a Constitution does not depend wholly upon the nature of the Constitution. The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislatures, the Executive and the Judiciary...

The observations of Dr. Ambedkar remain equally relevant today, if not much more prominently. Fifty five years have rolled by since the Constitution of India came into force. These years have seen many crises, some phases of turbulences, uncertainty and even confrontation. But the Constitution has, on the whole, served the nation very well. It has not failed the people. It is not without its shortcomings. But the failures have been due more to lapses of those who operated the Constitution rather than to any shortcomings in the Constitution itself. It is my earnest hope that, both in spirit and in letter, the constitutional scheme of separation of powers and, with it, the checks and balances, that are indispensable to democratic governance, will be respected, and the spirit of moderation and mutual respect, animated by a common commitment to the Constitution are followed in all cases and our efforts are fully directed towards improving the social and economic conditions of our people. They have a right to expect that of us.

Late Nani Palkhivala also believed in the efficacy of our Constitution as a vehicle of national weal. He ceaselessly strove to uphold the ethical and constitutional values of our country. He also laid utmost emphasis on the people who would work the Constitution and who would run the institutions of democracy. Republics perish when the commitment to the Constitution which provides the institutional framework to it is compromised. Nani Palkhivala had observed in the early 1990s:

> The greatest achievement of Indian Democracy is that it has survived unfractured for forty three years. 950 million people live together as one political entity under conditions of freedom. Never before in history, and nowhere else in the world today, has one-sixth of the human race existed as a single free nation...

In a Citation presented to Palkhivala in January 1998, the University of Mumbai so described him:

> You have, as India's leading jurist, through your scholarly writings, ... through myriad essays, articles and speeches...succeeded in educating the people and making them realize and appreciate their unique legacy...You have done all this with rare intellectual integrity, simplicity and sincerity, with devotion and dedication, with courage and conviction and above all frankness, so that our democracy remains vibrant and alive....

We, the People, and We, the Nation, owe it to Leaders of men like Nani Ardeshir Palkhivala, to uphold our constitutional norms and to preserve and protect the vision of our Founding Fathers as enshrined in the Constitution of India with uncompromising commitment. Before I conclude, let me once again thank the Bar Association of India for having associated me with the Second Palkhivala Memorial Lecture. I wish them all success in their endeavours towards the furtherance of the lofty ideals and sublime values cherished by Nani Palkhivala as well as the eternal message of our Constitution.

Thank you for your patient hearing.

ENSURING EFFECTIVE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT*

It gives me great pleasure to address this distinguished assembly on a theme of very crucial importance for the democratic world as a whole, and more particularly for the parliamentary fraternity.

We attach utmost significance to facilitating harmonious relationship among the organs of the State. In a parliamentary democracy, all institutions and organs of the State derive their authority from the sovereign will of the people. They are accountable to the people at all times for all acts of omission and commission. Effectively ensuring accountability holds the key to the success and sustenance of democracy.

Every endeavour towards progress and development in society should necessarily encompass in its fold, good governance practices and a good scheme of Government, with all the pillars of the State—the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary—discharging equal responsibility for ensuring a strong edifice of good governance. The principle of democratization of responsibilities and powers makes democracy the most effective system in ensuring that power does not assume sweeping proportions in one hand much against the tenets of good governance and development. It is in consonance with the best interests of democracy that each organ of the State is required to function with mutual trust and respect, recognizing the due place and jurisdiction - both functional and territorial—of the other.

As the supreme representative institution, the Parliament, in most democracies of the Westminster type, is accorded a pre-eminent position in the constitutional set-up. Yet, even the Parliament functions within the bounds of constitutional mandate. A very vital aspect of the relationship between Parliament and the Executive is that in a parliamentary democracy, the Executive emerges out of the Parliament itself and it remains in Office only so long as it enjoys the confidence of the House. In the words of Walter Bagehot, a cabinet in its origin belongs to the legislative part of the State, while in its functions it belongs to the executive part of the State.

Parliament, in order to ensure the cardinal principle of Executive accountability, must be able to scrutinize how public policy is carried out, to

* At the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers on *The Relationship between the Parliament and the Executive*, Nairobi, Kenya (4 January 2006).

ensure the objective of achieving socio-economic progress, enabling efficient administration and actualizing the aspirations of the people. Parliament must have the appropriate technical resources and the requisite information in order to conduct efficacious scrutiny and call the administration to account. That being so, various procedural mechanisms like Parliamentary Committees, Questions, etc. emerge as very powerful instruments in facilitating parliamentary oversight of administrative action. Members of Parliament have the freedom and the mandate to express their views on the policy formulation by the Executive and what modifications should be brought about in them. The Government has to be sensitive to parliamentary opinion, as discussions on various subjects in the parliamentary chambers are reflective of the national mood and bring the impact of public thinking on the administrative apparatus. Thus, the Legislature and the Executive are not envisaged as competing centres of power but as partners in the business of Government.

The effective use of Parliamentary Committees, especially, the Financial Committees and other Committees, which have an investigating role, would help in enabling an environment for securing Executive accountability. Parliamentarians must be properly equipped with resources to carry out their responsibilities in the exercise of oversight over the Executive. Thus, we have to develop new approaches to ensure that the Parliament and the Executive function effectively and cooperatively to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

The 'Commonwealth Principles on the Accountability of and the Relationship between the Three Branches of Government', have rightly stressed that Parliaments and Governments should maintain high standards of accountability, transparency and responsibility in the conduct of all public business and parliamentary procedures should provide adequate mechanisms to enforce the accountability of the Executive to the Parliament. The 'Latimer House Guidelines' have also emphasised that parliamentary procedures should provide adequate mechanisms to enforce the accountability of the Executive to the Parliament.

A weak Executive can lead to unstable and ineffective Government. An overbearing Executive, on the other hand, could try to override the authority of Parliament. It thus becomes imperative for Parliament, representing all citizens to be proactive in its passage of legislation and being fully involved in overseeing the Executive actions, and to be able to do that, the Parliament must have the formal powers, institutional capacity, financial and administrative autonomy and support mechanisms.

Insofar as institutional mechanisms are concerned, the Executive has easy access to extensive financial and technical resources, whereas in many countries, Parliaments usually lack access to such resources and expertise.

The representative bodies thus are somewhat disadvantaged in their ability to scrutinize, review and modify legislative and policy proposals. It is accepted by all concerned that Parliaments need to be financially and administratively independent of the Executive if it has to function objectively and effectively. In such a situation, it is important that appropriate measures should be taken to secure the independence of Parliament from the Executive. The principle that Parliament should have freedom to determine its budget has been highlighted in the 'Latimer House Guidelines' as well. Undoubtedly, financial independence of the Parliament would allow it and the Executive to be equal partners in ensuring national welfare.

The remarkable advancements in diverse fields warrant that Parliaments and their members upgrade their skills in varied ways to hold the Executive accountable through their role as critics and watchdogs. The complex nature of issues require that adequate, objective and timely information is made available to the members. It will also imply capacity-building on the part of Parliaments to interpret and use the accessible information. As such, Parliaments need to develop strong and competent support services at various levels to assist parliamentarians in their parliamentary duties and responsibilities.

Parliaments need adequate strengthening of skilled staff and they also need facilities within the institution such as research centres, information reservoirs and budget offices so as to enable them to carry out their roles. As legislators are in need of quality information which is both objective and timely, an efficient mechanism for identifying and obtaining sources of information located elsewhere in the Government and in the society should be developed. The rapid increase in the availability of electronic resources like the World Wide Web, e-mail, CD-ROMs, bulletin boards, high speed file transfer, etc. has had a significant impact on Legislatures and their Information Management Systems.

Parliaments across the world are implementing a number of activities to cope with the increasing information needs of members. Several Parliaments organize Orientation Programmes for newly elected legislators to familiarize them with the operational dynamics of their political systems. Training programmes for staff in assisting members in legislative research, budget analysis, making presentations, and computer use are also of utmost importance.

In our country, the independence of the Secretariat of Parliament from the Executive Branch has been constitutionally ordained, enabling its officers and staff to assist the members of Parliament in securing Executive accountability to the supreme representative institution. As such, no Ministry or Department of the Government has any role either in its administrative matters or financial matters.

So far as the question of independence of Parliamentary Budgeting is concerned, a Budget Committee is appointed by the Speaker which consists of the Deputy Speaker as its Chairman and the Chairmen of the Estimates and the Public Accounts Committees, as members. The Budget Committee gets the Estimates approved by the Speaker, which are then sent to the Ministry of Finance for incorporation in the Union Budget.

As per well established conventions, the Budget Estimates of Lok Sabha are not subject to examination by any Departmental Committee of the Ministry of Finance or by any Committee of Parliament. In case the Ministry of Finance has to make any suggestion in respect of the Estimates, such suggestion is placed before the Speaker for his consideration and orders. The expenditure incurred on various appropriations under the Lok Sabha Budget head is met from the Consolidated Fund of India. Parliament sanctions the expenditure through the Appropriation Act. Our Rules of Procedure do not allow cut motions or discussions relating to the Budget of Parliament on the floor of the House. Once the House passes the Demands for Grants, the allotted Grants are regulated by the Secretariat for incurring expenditure. We do not seek the concurrence of the Ministry of Finance for incurring expenditure.

In our country, the Executive is not entitled to interfere in the financial management of the Secretariat, nor its concurrence is sought on any expenditure within the allotted Grants. The re-appropriations out of the savings are made directly by diverting money under those units of appropriations where deficit is noticed. The orders issued by the Government to the Ministries and Departments do not automatically apply to the Lok Sabha Secretariat and it is for the Speaker to make the financial adjustments, as per the needs of the House and its Secretariat. We have a mechanism whereby the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India, an independent constitutional functionary, permanently stations an audit party for internal audit of accounts of the Lok Sabha and its Secretariat.

We also have put in place administrative, research and other support systems to assist members to attend to their multifarious duties and responsibilities effectively. The recruitment and training of these professionals are carried out by our Secretariat, independent of the Executive Branch. The Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training is entrusted with the task of organizing Orientation Programmes for newly-elected parliamentarians as also undertaking Training and Refresher Programmes for our officers and staff. We have also made substantial progress towards computerization and modernization of our Secretariat, in particular of the Library, the Committees and Research Services, so that members can have access to professional assistance from within the Secretariat itself.

I believe that democracy cannot be sustained unless everyone associated with its functioning demonstrates a democratic spirit. The concepts of 'representation' and 'accountability' are at the centre of democratic governance. As far as the representative bodies are concerned, the notion of accountability is real in every sense of the term. We should remember that when representative democracy, in which Parliament is given the pride of place among the organs of State, ceases to exist, all other institutions of governance will fade into insignificance before an overbearing Executive. It is in this context that the independence of the process of parliamentary budgeting and building support systems become a challenging task for the Presiding Officers.

It is imperative for the parliamentarians to exercise their responsibilities fearlessly and work to restore 'the delicate balance between the Legislature and the Executive'. The Secretary-General of Commonwealth, Mr. Don McKinnon has voiced his apprehension that 'almost everywhere the balance has swung too far in the direction of the Executive and away from the Legislature'. We endorse his observation that 'Parliament needs to be seen as a partner with the Executive, not merely a conveyor belt for its business or an obstacle to be overcome' and that 'Parliament's vital function of scrutiny, its task of making the Executive accountable, must be safeguarded and strengthened'.

These indeed are the onerous duties that we should perform. I am sure the deliberations here today will throw up meaningful insights and practical suggestions to facilitate greater harmony between the Legislature and the Executive, including in the context of the independence of parliamentary budgeting and building support systems. I trust that our discussions and their outcome would go a long way in deepening democracy, a theme very dear to the Commonwealth community.

Thank you.

IMPERATIVE OF HARMONIOUS EXISTENCE AMONG ORGANS OF STATE*

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to this Emergent Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India. I am extremely thankful to all of you for having made it possible to attend this Conference at a very short notice.

As you may be aware, this Conference has been called in the wake of the judicial proceedings initiated by some former members of Parliament, who were expelled from the membership of the House due to acts of improper conduct of accepting money for asking questions in the House. Taking cognizance of the expelled members' plea, the Delhi High Court and the Hon'ble Supreme Court have issued notices *inter alia* against the Speaker of Lok Sabha and the Lok Sabha Secretariat. After considering all aspects, it was decided that I should not accept any such notice, far less respond to the same as I believe that there are no constitutional provisions under which a notice could be issued by the courts to the Speaker on matters involving voting by members and matters of discipline and as such strictly pertaining to the internal affairs of the House which are its own exclusive domain as per the Constitution. As the Speaker of Lok Sabha and as the Chairman of the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies, I considered it my bounden duty to call this Emergent Conference as we are faced with a situation which seems to detract from the constitutional position and rights of the House and its Members and the mandate of harmony between the Judiciary and the Legislature, the Speaker and the members of the Legislature.

Let me make it absolutely clear that it is farthest from our mind to have any confrontation with the Judiciary. The Legislatures have always recognized and respected the supremacy of the Judiciary in its assigned sphere. The Judiciary is an institution integral to our body politic. But, at the same time, the constitutional rights of the Legislature, the Speaker and the members of the Legislature are entitled to be respected by the other organs in a system governed by our Constitution. Our endeavour is to maintain the constitutional balance which is essential for the harmonious co-existence between the

* At the Emergent Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, New Delhi (4 February 2006).

different organs of the Government and for the sustenance of democracy in the country.

It is not necessary for me to recapitulate the constitutional provisions, of which you are fully aware. It has to be reiterated that all the constitutional provisions symbolize the supremacy of the Legislature and make it the master of its own privileges and procedures.

As a natural corollary to these provisions, there can be no authority other than the Legislature itself to look into the conduct of its members in the discharge of their duties. In the case of misconduct or contempt committed by its members, it is also well-established that the House can impose punishments such as admonition, reprimand, withdrawal from the House, suspension from the service of the House, imprisonment and expulsion from the House.

By and large, as per the constitutional mandate, the courts in India have exercised restraint and recognised the immunity of parliamentary proceedings from being called in question in the courts of law. Way back in 1954, in the case of *Raj Narain Singh v. Atmaram Govind Kher*, the Allahabad High Court had held:

> ...this Court is not, in any sense whatever, a court of appeal or revision against the Legislature or against the rulings of the Speaker who, as the holder of an office of the highest distinction, has the sole responsibility cast upon him of maintaining the prestige and dignity of the House.
>
> ...this Court has no jurisdiction to issue a writ, direction or order relating to a matter which affected the internal affairs of the House.

In the *M.S.M. Sharma Case* of 1960, the Apex Court had categorically upheld the sovereignty of the Legislature in matters pertaining to the power to conduct its own business:

> ... The validity of the proceedings inside the Legislature of a State cannot be called in question on the allegation that the procedure laid down by the law had not been strictly followed. No Court can go into the questions which are within the special jurisdiction of the Legislature itself, which has the power to conduct its own business.

The Supreme Court held in the *Tej Kiran v. N. Sanjiva Reddy Case* (AIR 1970 SC 1573) that it is the essence of parliamentary system of Government that people's representatives should be free to express themselves without fear of legal consequences. What they say is only subject to the discipline of the rules of Parliament, the good sense of the members and the

control of proceedings by the Speaker. The courts have no say in the matter and should really have none. In the *JMM Bribery Case*, the Supreme Court did not take any action against the concerned members citing the immunity/ protection that members enjoy under article 105(2) of the Constitution and observing that it is for the House to take action, if thought fit. Incidentally, a difference of opinion between two High Courts, cannot distract from the rights, authority and the sole jurisdiction of the Legislatures in a matter.

Under articles 122 and 212 of the Constitution, the validity of any proceedings of Legislature cannot be questioned on the ground of alleged irregularity of procedure. On this aspect also, in the case of *K. Anbazhagan Vs. Secretary, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly* (AIR 1988 Madras 275), the Madras High Court held:

> ... The Resolution of expulsion is not open to challenge on the ground that the concerned members were not heard as such a challenge would be a challenge on the ground of failure to follow a procedure which would amount to an 'irregularity' and not an 'illegality' having regard to provisions of article 212 of the Constitution of India. ...

There can be no authority other than the Parliament itself to look into the conduct of the members in the discharge of their duties and in the conduct of the business of the House. Therefore, no Court can go into this question. Order of expulsion is one of the powers, which the Parliament can surely impose on any erring member. In any event, the members have not been expelled by any action of the Speaker but by the reason of the votes cast or decision taken by the Hon'ble Members of Parliament individually and if any action is resorted to question the authority of Parliament in doing what it did, to my mind, will be clearly violative of article 105 of the Constitution of India.

One may also take note of Rule 389 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha which provides that all matters not specifically provided for in the rules and all questions relating to the detailed working of the rules shall be regulated in such manner as the Speaker may, from time to time, direct.

In the instant case, I had the privilege of discussing the matter of the issue of notice by the Courts to the Speaker and the Lok Sabha Secretariat with some of the most eminent lawyers of the country, including Shri Fali S. Nariman, Shri T.R. Andhyarujina, Shri Shanti Bhushan, Justice Sachar, Shri Rajeev Dhawan and Shri Kapil Sibal. Their considered opinion has been that I should not appear before any court of law even if any notice is issued. Dr. L.M. Singhvi, another distinguished lawyer, has also stated that the Speaker was well within his limit not to reply to the Supreme Court notice and that

the courts could not intervene directly or indirectly in parliamentary matters. Another eminent constitutional lawyer, Shri P.P. Rao, has stated that each House has exclusive jurisdiction over its own internal proceedings and has the right to commit and punish members for contempt and that courts do not interfere with the decision of the House concerning its recognized privileges, which include the right to expel members. Shri Fali S. Nariman has said:

> ... That the Speaker is made a party in a private litigation concerning something that happened within the four walls of the House is a matter for the petitioner who makes the petition to the court. He can implead anybody; he can implead the President. But the fact that the court permits such a procedure with the name of the Speaker being there is, in my opinion, a matter on which there is strong exception to be taken, for this reason.

Another leading lawyer, Shri T.R. Andhyarujina, has said:

> ... There is no doubt that every House of Legislature should remain responsible for disciplining its own members. As recently as 1997, the U.K. Joint Select Committee, with Lord Nicholls of Birkenhead as its Chairman, reported this as axiomatic. 'It is inconceivable,' it observed, 'that power to suspend or expel a member of either House should be exercisable by the Courts or some other outside body. No suggestion has been made to the Joint Committee that the Commons should lose its powers of suspension or expulsion, which are widely seen as essential for internal discipline.' In the UK, expulsion of a member of the Commons creates a vacancy and his or her term comes to an end. The position is the same in India.

I have been expressing my humble views that our Constitution does not contemplate the existence of a super organ or an organ having overriding authority over the others. What is essential is to have a harmonious relationship between the different organs and also respect for each other. Defending the rights of the Parliament, an All-Party Meeting, which I convened on 20 January 2006, in the wake of the developments in the instant case, unanimously felt that the Lok Sabha Speaker should neither accept the Supreme Court's notice nor appear before it on the issue of the expulsion of MPs.

It appears that the hon'ble Supreme Court has decided to look into the question of Parliament's right to expel its members as a constitutional issue. With all respect to the hon'ble Court, I feel that it would have been proper if the Court had first decided as to whether the Court itself had the constitutional authority to look into the question and whether it had any right to issue notice to the Speaker of Lok Sabha on a matter clearly indicated

by the Constitution as the exclusive domain of the Legislature. Until that is decided, the question of determination of the existence of the right of expulsion, and for that purpose, giving a notice to the Speaker are, if I may say so, not called for.

I submit that in our scheme of governance, such judicial proceedings are not maintainable as they lack the sanction of the Constitution. As the custodian of the powers, privileges and immunities of the Lok Sabha and of its Speaker and members, I cannot assent to make them a subject matter of judicial scrutiny, contrary to the constitutional provisions. It will seriously impair the prestige and dignity of the Legislature and will detract from the constitutional balance, undermining the principle of Separation of Powers, one of the basic features of our Constitution, as interpreted by the Supreme Court itself.

Let me hasten to add that there is no question of adopting an attitude of confrontation with the Court. The issue is of constitutional rights, propriety, and obligations of the Legislature, the Speaker and the members of the Legislature which cannot be compromised. It is worth emphasizing the observation of Dr. Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar, one of the founding fathers of the Constitution, in the Constituent Assembly that the doctrine of judicial independence is not to enable the Judiciary to function as a kind of 'super Legislature' or 'super Executive'.

Hon'ble Presiding Officers, it is the collective responsibility of all institutions of governance and of our democracy, including the civil society and the media, to ensure that the harmonious relationship between the different organs in the scheme of governance in our country, as thoughtfully provided in our Constitution, is scrupulously adhered to and that every organ of the State discharges its responsibilities effectively, within the ambit of the Constitution only. As you would recall, we have deliberated upon the issue of Legislature-Judiciary relationship in our Conferences on several occasions. The very fact that, as a body, we have repeatedly deliberated on this sensitive issue is a pointer to the seriousness, sincerity and constitutional propriety with which we look at the issues involved. We have consistently asserted that we should maintain the constitutional balance and harmonious relationship between these two vital pillars of our parliamentary polity at all times. I am sure we will have meaningful discussions once again at this Emergent Conference and I seek your views on the matter.

Thank you.

JUDICIARY AND LEGISLATURE UNDER THE CONSTITUTION*

I feel greatly honoured to have been invited by the Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies to deliver the Memorial Lecture in the series named after the late Shri G.V. Mavalankar, who had the singular distinction of beginning his legislative career by occupying the office of the Speaker itself in the erstwhile Bombay Legislative Assembly way back in 1937, before going on to become the Speaker of the Central Legislative Assembly, of the Constituent Assembly (Legislative), of the Provisional Parliament and of our First Lok Sabha. He was undoubtedly one of the chief architects of parliamentary institutions in our country.

Today, a grateful nation recalls with reverence and admiration the remarkable contributions that Shri Ganesh Vasudev Mavalankar made towards moulding parliamentary traditions and laying the foundations of establishing the framework of a working democracy. As the first Speaker of a new-born nation's highest representative body, Mavalankarji's role was not merely that of a moderator and facilitator of its functioning, but that of a statesman and an institution-builder. He not only guided the proceedings in the House with a rare finesse but also carved out a niche for himself as an outstanding leader and a highly accomplished parliamentary administrator.

A number of innovative practices and procedures that we make use of even today evolved as part of Mavalankarji's endeavours to fine-tune parliamentary work. Importantly, much of it came through his personal endeavours and admirable power of persuasion, which revolved around firm, yet flexible and fair approach that he displayed, even towards those who differed with him. He was aware of his onerous responsibilities as the Speaker of the First Lok Sabha, which impelled him to see that the various rules and procedures were evolved and implemented in the right spirit and the best traditions of parliamentary democracy. His deep concern for maintaining sound democratic traditions in the country is reflected in his words, when he said:

> Parliamentary life has only recently begun in our land and it is yet a tender plant that requires delicate and careful handling—and,

* At the Ninth G.V. Mavalankar Memorial Lecture on *Judiciary and Legislature under the Constitution* organised by the Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies, New Delhi (24 August 2006).

> if I may say so, careful nursing. It is, therefore, the special responsibility of this Parliament to set up sound and healthy traditions, as whatever we do now is more likely to be a precedent for all times to come. Unless, therefore, we keep continuity and respect traditions, it will be difficult to have stable Governments in the land which may be able to serve our people in the manner we desire...

Needless to say, Mavalankarji worked all through the formative years of our Republic to nurse and nurture the tender sapling of parliamentary democracy.

Mavalankarji always stressed that the Parliament was the supreme law-making body in our constitutional scheme. For him, no one was above Parliament, and for this, he expected not only the Ministers and the others holding power and position to be sensitive to their constitutionally assigned responsibilities and jurisdictions, but he also ensured that the key democratic institutions functioned in a manner that would never compromise with the dignity and honour of Parliament. He had unwavering commitment to the constitutional mandate, and an unflinching adherence to the basic spirit of democracy and to the task of nation-building.

Mavalankarji firmly believed that parliamentary democracy was an evolutionary process, and not something that could be created overnight. It had to evolve and grow, and if it had to succeed as a sustainable system, its broad norms were to be imbibed by all its constituents, be it the Parliament or the other two organs of State, the Executive and the Judiciary. He believed that for the effective and meaningful functioning of democracy, it was necessary not only to put in place a credible mechanism of checks and balances but also to inform and educate people, to create cooperative mindsets and a healthy public opinion in the country and to make the people conscious of their rights and duties. For this, he expended all his energies to ensure that the policies and programmes of the Government were critically debated, understood and evaluated by the people. In this context, I am reminded of his memorable words, on his unanimous election as the Speaker of the Constituent Assembly (Legislative) on 17 November 1947:

> Free, frank and impersonal discussion of every question, viewed from the point of view of the betterment of the conditions of the masses and with an international outlook on world peace is, I may be permitted to say, the very soul of democracy, for which the last devastating war was said to have been fought. In order to work for the fulfilment of that democracy, we shall be required to lay down our own standards and establish traditions and with the sincere cooperation of all the members of this august Assembly, I hope to be

helpful in upholding the best democratic standards and traditions and the dignity and independence of this House.

He upheld the highest traditions of parliamentary democracy and endeavoured to see that such values are inculcated in our elected representatives. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru rightly referred to him as the 'Father of the Lok Sabha', which was a testimony to his stature and status. His name, as Pandit Nehru said in his tribute, 'will be associated with the Lok Sabha for long times to come as a person who gave it shape, gave it direction and gave it the stamp and impress of his personality'.

Before I proceed further, I pay my homage to the memory of Shri G.V. Mavalankar, a great son of India, one of the most illustrious builders of modern India, whose contribution to the cause of parliamentary democracy, will always be written in letters of gold.

The subject *Judiciary and Legislature under the Constitution* is a theme which Mavalankarji was very much concerned with and which has a crucial significance in the functioning of our democratic polity today as well.

When India attained freedom in 1947, one of the biggest challenges before the framers of our Constitution was to identify a system of governance that could respond effectively to the vast array of diversity of our country as also the myriad socio-economic problems that we were faced with in those tumultuous days. They finally adopted a parliamentary democratic system, after purposive and elaborate debate, with the conviction that it best suited our ethos and culture and the specificities of our nation. In choosing a parliamentary democratic system what prevailed on the Founding Fathers was the realization that a representative democracy with the elected representatives, working in tandem with the Executive and the Judiciary, is best suited to address the challenges of diversity, multicultural identity, democratic ethos and the developmental needs of our people.

Our people and their leadership had great expectations from it, in spite of the fact that the world around us was quite sceptical about our ability to successfully operate a democratic system. Proving those sceptics wrong, we have sustained a parliamentary democratic system, may be with some imperfections, all these years.

Today, having come through fourteen General Elections and experienced a good degree of political stability for nearly six decades, no one would dispute that Indian democracy has come of age and that democracy is here to stay. Our so called illiterate voters have time and again proven their maturity and political prudence by using the power of the ballot to change the Government six out of those fourteen times that they had the opportunity to

exercise their franchise. This democratic consolidation, preserving and protecting the unity of such a heterogeneous country with one billion plus people, practising different religions, speaking innumerable languages, and home to a wide variety of customs and practices, has indeed been a gigantic challenge that post-independent India largely met, to the envy of many.

Recognizing representation and accountability as being at the centre of democratic set-up, our Founding Fathers made it the central issue of governance in the country and institutions have been provided at different levels, to ensure that these concepts remain at the center of our political system too. Thus, a place of pre-eminence has been given to our Parliament, the only organ directly representative of the people, and as such accountable to them, with very extensive powers, including even the power to deal with its own creator, the Constitution. The Cabinet is the result of the fusion between the Legislative and Executive wings of the Government.

At the same time, the makers of the Constitution also recognized that excessive power, if vested with any of the three organs of State, could possibly undermine the foundations of democracy and, therefore, they adopted a constitutional mechanism that combined a judicious blend of checks and balances to determine the functioning of our democratic organs in such a manner that each one of them functioned within its assigned limits, complementing and supplementing each other's efforts towards good governance and nation-building. In fact, the idea of separation of powers and checks and balances are the two important pillars identified by our visionary Founding Fathers, in the Constituent Assembly, for the specific objective of securing a reasonable degree of equilibrium in the polity. They visualized the need of harmonious co-existence and mutual respect amongst them so that they could work in a smooth and coordinated manner. In this constitutional scheme, it is the Parliament that enacts laws; the Executive implements them; and the Judiciary is the independent arbitrator who interprets them.

Placing Parliament at the centre of the political system also implied laying greater degree of responsibility on this popular institution being the only body elected by the people for guiding the destiny of the nation. No one can dispute that over the years, our Parliament has come to be identified, both in theory and in practice, to be the pivot of our political system. It has been instrumental, while respecting the sanctity of the Constitution, for ensuring that the fundamental law of the land kept pace with the changing needs of a growing society by taking recourse to the constituent power bestowed on it as and when the situation so demanded and for taking the initiative for several progressive legislations in the larger interest of the country. As a collective body, time and again, our Parliament has conveyed to the world at large that its voice will have to be reckoned with on matters concerning India's interests as also on all major issues of our time.

The efficiency, professionalism, unity of purpose and the commitment to the larger national causes that the Parliamentary Committees have been demonstrating all through the years have been of exceptionally high standards. In recent years we have taken several initiatives to take the Parliament closer to the people. The introduction of a full-fledged, 24-hours Lok Sabha Television Channel; the creation of various Parliamentary Forums to ensure more effective involvement of the people's representatives in matters that require concerted national attention, particularly on issues that could have a bearing on the future of the country; more and more opportunities for discussions and interactive sessions with social activists, intellectuals, academia, etc. are all meant to ensure more effective interface between the civil society and the representative body of the people.

However, these positive achievements of the Parliament cannot make up for the growing disillusionment about the efficacy of democratic institutions among the people of the country today. As a distinguished journalist H.K. Dua put it: 'At teashops and *dhabas* across the country—and even in the drawing rooms of Shining India—the people with varying degree of cynicism are beginning to question many an assumption underlying the prevailing political system.' What is more worrying, according to him, is 'the health of the institutions that are supposed to guide the affairs of the nation and take India forward towards a better future... Unfortunately, the performance of these institutions during the past five decades is not what it ought to have been. Parliament, after a great initial start, is becoming less vigilant and effective in defending the rights of the people or giving them a constructive lead; the administration by habit remains distant and callous towards most people whom it should serve; and the judiciary—the *kachehri*, which is the last hope of the people—is not able to dispense justice to all, despite an awakened Supreme Court that knows the problem but is unable to provide the cure. Most political parties have been found wanting...'

There are many undesirable tendencies that we need to address on a priority basis if we have to sustain our people's faith in the democratic institutions. Bringing about integrity in our public life and in the political profession is an important issue before our country today. The perceived criminalisation of politics has vitiated our political system in a very regrettable manner. While the malaise of corruption has always been a major issue in any polity, more so in a democratic polity like ours, what has brought the issue to the centre stage is the influence of money and muscle power in our electoral process and the resultant aberrations of politics. Degeneration of the electoral system, as a result of the illegal and immoral practices used in many places for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity and contributing to the growing political apathy among the people. We need to seriously ponder over and address the

issue of corruption, criminalisation and the communalisation of politics, the vicious role played by money and muscle powers, inadequate representation of women and, more significantly, the declining voter participation in the polls in many States.

I must add here that our Parliament itself has to be ever vigilant of the growing resentment among our people about the way the institutions of our democracy function. It is on Parliament, more than on any other organ, that the responsibility for sustaining people's faith in democracy as the most sensitive system to the people's problems, rests. Therefore, the institution collectively and the individual members, who constitute it, will have to function as role models for the society at large. As the Presiding Officer of the House of the People, I am acutely aware of this great responsibility and I appeal to all to help in the proper functioning of the House.

Our people are, justifiably, becoming critical of the way our democratic institutions are functioning today. Debates and discussion, the hallmarks of democracy, are being over-shadowed by disruption, confrontation and other non-democratic alternatives. The frequent disorderly scenes and forced adjournments do not serve our democracy better than reasoned debates and articulation of people's problems on the floor of the chambers. All of us in Parliament need to be concerned about it and endeavour to restore true democratic culture into the functioning of these institutions. Intolerance and denial of rights of others are antithetical to democracy.

As distinguished political analyst, Shri Inder Malhotra, puts it:

> Every matter, including the most trivial, is under disputation, so relentless and raucous, that governance of the vast country is becoming well nigh impossible... .
>
> ... can there be a more telling proof of the chaos--resulting from not only the lack of consensus but also from the violation of the most elementary norms of democracy—that at the time of writing (22 August 2006), 200 'working hours' of Parliament in the ongoing monsoon session have been 'wasted' in the almost daily disruption of proceedings by screaming MPs that are verbally abusive of each other and embarrassingly close to physical violence?

Though the figure mentioned is not correct, the gravity of the issue sought to be highlighted cannot be ignored. The editorial comments in *The Tribune*, a very reputed newspaper, early this week, also merits mention here:

> The loss to the nation by the non-functioning of our parliamentarians runs into crores of rupees every year. And it is the taxpayers' money

> which goes down the drain. The nation suffers for this irresponsible behaviour of the MPs, who perhaps think that they have been elected to cause uproar and disrupt the proceedings. The rule of 'no work, no pay' should be applicable in their case if it applies to other salaried people, though this will not be enough punishment to the people's representatives.

I have quoted these comments, at the risk of inviting tedium, to convey the extent of the growing sense of dismay and criticism of the people about the way our institutions are functioning. We must always bear in mind that the most important imponderable that goes into the sustenance of democracy is the people's faith in its institutions. Once that faith is lost no force, no army will be able to protect these institutions. We, therefore, have to strive together to ensure that the politics of confrontation and of intolerance that prevails in the country today give way to one of reconciliation and accommodation at least so far as the issues of national importance are concerned. Our political life in general and the functioning of our representative institutions in particular are being increasingly vitiated by acutely partisan attitudes getting deeply entrenched in our system at different levels. The polity fractured on religious, caste, regional and linguistic basis is greatly weakening our democratic structure and hindering the country's progress. My earnest appeal to all institutions of democracy is to work together to correct this trend, thereby regaining the trust and confidence of the people.

Ultimately, what is important is that all should become and remain sensitive both to the Constitution that created them as also to the hopes and aspirations of the people for safeguarding whose interest they are created. While considering the respective role and relevance of two of the fundamental organs of governance in a democracy, the Legislature and the Judiciary, we have to weigh them against this yardstick. On the one hand, we find that people are increasingly becoming cynical about vital institutions of governance primarily because they feel that the institutions are not coming up to the expectations of the people and on the other, even the institutions themselves are not contributing towards mutually sustaining or enhancing the people's respect towards them. No institution can escape their share of the responsibility for this.

It is with the idea of ensuring that the fundamental rights of the citizens of the country are not interfered with or contravened by any authority, that the Judiciary is conferred certain powers to decide about the validity of the laws passed by the Parliament apart from deciding disputes between the citizens according to the laws of the land. Our constitutional provisions have also enabled the Judiciary to set aside not only laws passed by the Parliament but also all executive actions which are not in consonance with the rights of

the citizens as our Constitution confers. Obviously, Judiciary is not the authority to enact laws, which is within the sole authority of the concerned Legislatures. 'Laws' within the meaning of article 141 of the Constitution, as I perceive, do not contemplate to be judge-made but are principles of decisions based on judicial interpretation of laws enacted by Parliament.

The provisions of the Constitution dealing particularly with the Union Judiciary clearly provide for a close relationship between the Judiciary and the Legislature not in a manner of controlling each other but of a mutually complementary working relationship which should necessarily be based on harmony between the two most important organs of the State.

Under article 124, the number of Judges, which the Constitution initially provided for, can be increased by law made by Parliament. The Executive appoints the Judge in consultation with such of the Judges as the Executive may decide which has been construed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court to mean the concurrence and consent of the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India.

Under article 124(5), it is the Parliament which may make law to regulate the procedure for the presentation of an address and for the investigation and proof of misbehaviour or incapacity of a Judge under article 124(4) which provides for the removal of a Judge of the Supreme Court by the President after an address by each House of Parliament supported by the given majority on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity. Under article 125, the salary of the Judges is determined by the Parliament by law. Article 137 provides that the Supreme Court shall have the power to review any judgment pronounced or order, subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament or rules made under article 145. Article 138 provides that 'The Supreme Court shall have such further jurisdiction and powers with respect to any of the matters in the Union List as Parliament may by law confer.' Under article 138(2), the Supreme Court shall have such further jurisdiction and powers with respect to any matter as the Government of India and the Government of any State may by special agreement confer, if Parliament by law provides for the exercise of such jurisdiction and powers by the Supreme Court. Under Article 139, Parliament may by law confer on the Supreme Court power to issue directions, orders or writs, for any purposes other than those mentioned in article 32(2).

Under article 140, it is the Parliament which by law make provision for conferring upon the Supreme Court such supplemental powers not inconsistent with any of the provisions of the Constitution as may appear to be necessary or desirable for the purpose of enabling the Court more effectively to exercise the jurisdiction conferred upon it by or under the Constitution. I have mentioned some of these articles only to reiterate a constitutional reality which clearly establishes that only the Parliament can confer ancillary powers on the Supreme Court.

A reading of article 142 further supports this contention. It specifically provides that any decree passed or order made by the Supreme Court shall be enforceable through the territory of India 'in such manner as may be prescribed by or under any law made by Parliament and until provision in that behalf is so made, in such manner as the President may by order prescribe', meaning thereby that the Executive may by order prescribe. Our Constitution does not contemplate nor provide for the use of court's power to execute its decrees or orders by use of 'jurisdiction *in terrorem*', namely the power to punish for 'contempt of court', which is not the manner which has been prescribed by any law made by Parliament for enforcement of orders and decrees. Article 142(2) provides that the Supreme Court's power to secure the attendance of any person or the discovery or production of any documents or the investigation or punishment of any contempt of itself shall be subject to the provision of any law made in this behalf by the Parliament.

These provisions of the Constitution show the intention of the framers of the Constitution regarding the mutual relationship between the Parliament and the Supreme Court of India which is the highest judicial forum. Obviously, it does not contemplate of any attempt of confrontation or even of non-cooperation. The supremacy of the law of Parliament in certain given respects, so far as the Judiciary is concerned, establishes the primacy of Parliament constituted of the elected representatives of the people.

One may also refer to what Dr. Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar, one of the Founding Fathers of our Constitution, observed about the prospective role of the Judiciary in our constitutional scheme. Speaking in the Constituent Assembly, he expressed the view that the doctrine of judicial independence was not to enable the Judiciary to function as a kind of a 'super Legislature' or a 'super Executive'. I am also reminded of the wise and profound words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru:

> No Supreme Court and no Judiciary can stand in judgment over the sovereign will of Parliament representing the will of the entire community. If we go wrong here and there, it can point it out, but in the ultimate analysis, where the future of the community is concerned, no Judiciary can come in the way. And if it comes in the way, ultimately the whole Constitution is the creation of Parliament. It is obvious that no court, no system of Judiciary can function in the nature of a Third House, as a kind of Third House of correction. So, it is important that with this limitation the Judiciary should function... ultimately the fact remains that the Legislature must be supreme and must not be interfered with by the court of law in such measures of social reforms.

It hardly needs to be emphasized that each organ of the State, be it the Legislature, the Executive or the Judiciary, should function in conformity with the basic spirit of the Constitution and in accordance with its provisions. This relationship has been clearly defined and demarcated in purpose, intent and areas of activities. All of us will agree that the centrality and supremacy of the Constitution should prevail at all times so that the system could work efficiently and in a well-coordinated manner.

Our experience shows that the Judiciary has been largely sensitive to the constitutional spirit behind the privileges of the Legislature and recognized the immunity of parliamentary proceedings from being called in question in the Courts of Law. Way back in 1954, in the case of *Raj Narain Singh v. Atmaram Govind Kher* (AIR 1954 Allahabad 319), the Allahabad High Court had held:

> ...this Court is not, in any sense whatever, a Court of appeal or revision against the Legislature or against the rulings of the Speaker who, as the holder of an office of the highest distinction, has the sole responsibility cast upon him of maintaining the prestige and dignity of the House. ... this Court has no jurisdiction to issue a writ, direction or order relating to a matter which affected the internal affairs of the House.

Again, in the *M.S.M. Sharma Case* (AIR 1959 SC 395), the Apex Court upheld the sovereignty of the Legislature in matters pertaining to the power to conduct its own business and in the *Tej Kiran Jain v. N. Sanjiva Reddy* (AIR 1970 SC 1573), the Supreme Court further reiterated the constitutional guarantee with regard to immunity of parliamentary proceedings in respect of anything said in the House or any Committee thereof and 'anything' has been held to be equivalent to 'everything'. The Court held:

> The article confers immunity *inter alia* in respect of 'anything said... in Parliament', the word 'anything' is of the widest import and is equivalent to 'everything'. The only limitation arises from the words 'in Parliament' which means during the sitting of Parliament and in the course of business of Parliament. Once it is proved that Parliament was sitting and its business was being transacted, anything said during the course of that business was immune from proceedings in any Court. What they say is only subject to the discipline of the rules of Parliament, the good sense of the members and the control of proceedings by the Speaker. The Courts have no say in the matter and should really have none.

Despite a broad consensus on the issue, there have been some occasions when judicial intervention in the procedural aspects of the Legislatures has

created somewhat anomalous situations. It needs to be appreciated here that articles 122 and 212 of the Constitution explicitly symbolize the supremacy of the Legislatures within their own spheres, and these provisions are equally binding on the Speakers as well as on all courts.

It is worrisome that instances of straying from the strict path of constitutional provisions, in the well-recognized scheme of separation of powers, have been increasing because of the liberal recourse to what is described as Public Interest Litigation, which has naturally raised doubts and confusion in the minds of the people about the respective domains of the different organs of the State. Let me add, I have no doubt whatsoever that the PIL, if used with the objective with which it was initially adopted in the 1980s, is an effective mechanism to sustain the faith of the poor and the disadvantaged people in the administration of justice and in the Rule of Law. If, however, resorting to novel methods of adjudication interferes with the discharge of its primary functions of dispensation of justice, I feel, we need to reconsider the whole gamut of the matter and come up with ways and means to address the problem. This would call for serious introspection on the part of all institutions of governance in our country.

To my mind, what is required for any institution to perform most effectively is, to start with, a realistic role-perception within the broader systemic framework. We must recognize what Justice Srikrishna, a learned Judge of the Apex Court had observed: 'the answers to many socio-economic and political problems lie with Parliament and in a polling booth and not in a courtroom,' and that misplaced activism 'strains the institutional resources of the court. It also diverts the time, talent and energy of Judges into channels that they are neither required to navigate, nor equipped to, for lack of competence, skill or resources.' Once the Judiciary gets involved with an issue, otherwise coming within the executive domain, it precludes the possibility of the legislature exercising its own assigned role of ensuring executive accountability through effective legislative scrutiny over such issues. As another eminent jurist pointed out: 'The judiciary's task does not include an amorphous supervision of the government.'

Similar sentiments were expressed by Justice Markanday Katju of the Supreme Court when he said: 'I do not subscribe to the view that judiciary should be seen as running the government. Everything is being raised through PILs. The judiciary must know its limits, otherwise there would be a reaction' and that 'it has become a fashion to file PILs raising almost all matters before the court which normally fall within the domain of the Executive.' Let us not forget the basic premise, as the learned jurist Fali Nariman says in his recent book *India's Legal System: Can it be Saved?* 'Under our constitutional scheme the social, economic and political aspects of justice (stated in the Preamble)

are left primarily to the Law-makers (Parliament and the State Legislatures). The entire legislative process, it is assumed, is influenced by considerations of justice and reason...'

The confidence of the people in the justice-delivery system is an essential prerequisite for the very survival of democracy. The loss of that confidence can lead to instability and threaten the very essence of democracy. We are all aware how difficult it is for a common man, a dismissed worker or a peasant uprooted from his land or a school teacher or an oppressed woman to approach the courts of law, for justice. The cost of litigation, the fees of successful lawyers and even the expenses of initiating the dispute redressal system are beyond the reach of most of the common people who seek justice.

The mounting pendency of cases at every level of our judicial system is a matter of grave concern for the people of our country. As per the statistics presented to the Parliament last year by the Government, as on 21 March 2005, the total number of pending cases in various High Courts stood at 36,48,475, and among them, the number of cases pending for more than ten years was 6,54,206. The District and Subordinate Courts had a pendency of over 20 million cases. This, indeed, is a matter of grave concern. Even, the Apex Court, has to grapple with a large number of cases, which are pending for 5, 10 or 20 years. Our immediate priority, therefore, must be to devise some definite action plan for a time-bound clearance of arrears in our Courts.

The most important requirement, therefore, is to have a speedy and effective justice delivery system. As very poignantly observed by Nani Palkhivala, one of the outstanding legal minds of post-Independence India.

> ...I am not aware of any country in the world where litigation goes on for as long a period as in India. Our cases drag over a length of time which makes eternity intelligible. The law may or may not be an ass, but in India it is certainly a snail and our cases proceed at a pace which would be regarded as unduly slow in a community of snails. Justice has to be blind but I see no reason why it should also be lame: here it just hobbles along, barely able to walk.

The gravity of the problem was recognized by the Hon'ble Supreme Court as early as in 1979, when it observed in the *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar Case* that 'speedy trial is of essence to criminal justice and there can be no doubt that the delay in trial by itself constitutes denial of justice.' Later in 1986, Chief Justice P.N. Bhagwati perceptively observed that 'the judicial system is creaking under the weight of arrears'. What he forewarned twenty years back is afflicting the judicial system at various levels even today, that too with a greater vehemence. Yet, it is a matter of great concern that the problem continues unabated, demanding practical solutions from all of us.

People's primary expectation from the judicial system – which includes the lawyers, Judges and the administrative system – is the availability of speedy, affordable and effective justice to all. In spite of the gravity of the situation, nothing much is being done to reach justice to the common people, for reducing the costs of litigation, to minimize the difficulty of access to the courts by the common people, especially those living in the rural areas and far-flung places. As the eminent jurist, M.C. Chagla stated: 'If sections of society are deprived of the benefits of law and are treated as second class citizens, or if the law does not protect the liberty of the individual, then it would be meaningless to say that the Rule of Law prevails.' Judicial reforms will have no meaning for the common people if they are not able to approach the court and not have their matters taken up by competent lawyers at affordable costs and have their cases disposed of within a reasonable time.

I must confess that I am a votary of setting up the Circuit Benches of our Apex Court at least in the different metropolitan cities and of suitable number of Benches of the State High Courts at appropriate places in the State concerned. Such proposals are resisted by some sections within the Bench and the Bar claiming that such otherwise pro-people reforms would affect the integrity and unitary character of the Court and would lead to unsettled jurisdiction. To me these reasons are unconvincing and unrealistic and, seen from the angle of the magnitude of the problem of arrears, the advantages for the people would far outweigh the perceived difficulties. More than anything else, such initiatives will help in taking our justice-delivery system at different levels closer as also cheaper for the people who are its real patrons and the intended beneficiaries.

Institutions of governance have relevance for the people only when they serve the purpose for which they have been created. In a democratic set up, the space and role of every institution is expected to be clearly earmarked in the Constitution that creates it. It is in the effective discharge of the functions expected of it that it serves the people for whom the institutions are meant. This can be accomplished without intruding into or trivializing the role of co-ordinate institutions or without undermining the importance of fundamental democratic processes. To my mind, when institutions succeed in functioning strictly within the domain assigned to each, not only do they grow in public esteem, but they also create the ideal conditions for the effective functioning of the entire system.

One cannot disagree with the sentiments thoughtfully expressed by Dr. Harish Khare, an eminent journalist:

> Of late, we appear to be on the verge of entering a dangerous phase. There seems to be a new arrogance: (that) the Government does not deserve to be respected, and it is deemed a legitimate exercise to question

> not only policies but also motives. The assumption is that the elected representatives of the people cannot be trusted with the public interest, and that it is up to the unelected gods -- in the judiciary, the media, civil society, the private sector — to step in and to 'save the nation.'
>
> .... It should be a cause for concern when a verdict gets influenced less by constitutional arguments and legal reasoning and more by a disapproval of the ways of the political class. Any reminder of institutional boundaries is sought to be seen as a 'confrontation.'
>
> ....Because of a breakdown in the norms of self-restraint among those who fancy themselves as guardians of the constitutional order and public interest, we have produced a script for paralysis.

These observations, no doubt, reflect the general refrain among the people across the social spectrum. There are occasions when an impression is created that some of the vital institutions do not discharge their responsibilities and that they are irrelevant. If we do anything to undermine the importance of democratic institutions or weaken their effectiveness, our system as a whole will suffer and our democratic existence itself will be in danger.

If today we take pride in being the world's largest democracy, with all its imperfections, as someone who has been intimately connected with the highest representative institution of our country for more than three and a half decades and having seen its good and bad tidings, I would unhesitatingly say that it is our Parliament that can take the maximum credit for this. The commitment and sensitivity to democratic values demonstrated by our Founding Fathers and other leaders and parliamentarians who led the country in its formative years, aberrations apart, have all contributed immensely to the building up of that democratic edifice in the country over the years.

There is definitely sufficient space in our system for all the institutions to coexist and work together for the common weal. As I have repeatedly said, the people look up to the courts which are temples of justice, with great expectation, hope and confidence. Similarly, people look up to the Parliament and State Legislatures, of which the Executive is a part, with as much, if not more expectation and hope, because under the Constitution, the Parliament is the supreme legislative institution of the country, the people's institution par excellence, through which executive accountability is enforced. We must recognize that the Constitution is the supreme law, and no organ of State should go beyond what has been assigned to it by the Constitution. It is the duty of all concerned, including the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary, to ensure that this balance is scrupulously adhered to. And suffice is it to say that as the institution that encompasses in its fold the sovereign will of the people, it is the Parliament which enjoys primacy, within the

constitutional mandate; after all, the Constitution is the fountain-head of our parliamentary democracy. Sagacious and visionary leaders like Ganesh Vasudev Mavalankar strove all through their life to preserve and protect this lofty ideal of our constitutional system, an ideal which needs repeated reiteration as it has an eternal bearing on our parliamentary polity and constitutional framework.

With these words, I once again pay my humble tributes to the memory of Shri G.V. Mavalankar. Though we have travelled a long way with our democratic experience, we cannot afford to become complacent and take even the minor threats to democracy lightly. We need to bear in mind that there is no substitute for harmonious relationship among the different organs of State and that all constitutional provisions and laws made thereunder should be implemented in full earnest to serve the masses for whom they are meant. What we need is a strong commitment and sensitivity to the people's concerns, to parliamentary democracy and to our constitutional framework.

Thank you.

JUSTICE DELIVERY SYSTEM: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES*

I feel greatly honoured to be here amidst this distinguished assembly of the Bar and the Bench on the auspicious occasion of the Rajyothsava Day Celebrations of the State of Karnataka and the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of its High Court. I am indeed grateful to Hon'ble Chief Justice, Mr. Cyriac Joseph, for giving me this opportunity to associate myself with these celebrations.

Over the five decades of its existence as a separate State of the Indian Union, Karnataka has made remarkable strides moving forward from being a basically agricultural economy, into a highly industrialized State. Karnataka, today, has emerged as the IT powerhouse of India and the second most important global IT centre after the Silicon Valley. Bangalore is one of the fastest growing cities in Asia and is well-known the world over as India's science city. In education, health-care, infrastructure development, agriculture and various other fields, too, Karnataka has made substantial progress. I wish the State continued success in its march on the path of progress.

Friends, it is indeed praiseworthy that during the past five decades, judicial administration has also made considerable advances in the State. I understand that the remarkable developments in information technology have very appropriately been made use of not only in the High Court of Karnataka but in the 617 Subordinate Courts in the State. The State has given a lead in the use of information technology in the judicial administration of Subordinate Courts in the country.

The quality of services rendered by the legal fraternity manning the judicial administration is unquestionably the most important factor in making the justice delivery system effective. Karnataka has the distinction of producing a number of outstanding legal minds of the country. Justice E.S. Venkataramaiah, Justice K. Jagannatha Shetty, Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah, Justice N. Venkatachala, Justice S. Rajendra Babu, Justice N. Santosh Hegde, Justice Shivraj V. Patil and Justice R.V. Raveendran of the High Court of Karnataka were elevated as Judges of the Supreme Court of India.

* At the Rajyothsava Day of the State of Karnataka and the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the High Court of Karnataka, Bangalore (1 November 2006).

Among them, Justice E.S. Venkataramiah, Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah and Justice S. Rajendra Babu have rendered great services to the nation as the Chief Justices of India. One of my illustrious predecessors as Speaker of Lok Sabha, Shri K.S. Hegde, was another great name among the Judiciary in Karnataka before his elevation as a learned Judge of the Supreme Court, where he had an outstanding career. I recall here the names of some other legal luminaries like Justice S.P. Bharucha, Justice S.B. Majumdar, Justice G.T. Nanavati, Justice P.V. Reddi, Justice R.P. Sethi, Justice Ashok Bhan and Justice B.P. Singh, who have made great contributions to the judicial system of Karnataka before joining as Judges of the Supreme Court of India. Justice S.R. Dasgupta of the Calcutta High Court adorned the office of the Chief Justice of the erstwhile Mysore High Court and made a distinctive mark on the judicial system of the State and the country. As such, all of you can feel proud of the invaluable contributions of the distinguished Judges of the Karnataka High Court.

Karnataka and, indeed, all other States have to make available to everyone an equitable share in the benefits of their developmental efforts. The Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka has very appropriately chosen the subject, *Justice for All: Real and Speedy*, as the theme for its Golden Jubilee Celebrations. The theme, *Justice Delivery System: Issues and Problems*, on which I have been asked to speak today, is important not only in the context of Karnataka but of the rest of the country as well. The success of our judicial machinery has a close link with the Bar and the Bench who are required to address the primary demands of the people on the justice delivery. The fraternity is not expected to be a self-serving one; it has relevance to the people only to the extent that it is an effective instrument in providing justice to the common people, particularly the most vulnerable sections of the communities.

To my mind, the greatest challenge to good governance in a parliamentary democracy, is that of bridging the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms, which along with the framework of supportive rules, regulations and procedures, have to be continuously reviewed, keeping in mind the changing needs of the society. This process is essential for ensuring that the primary institutions of governance—the Judiciary, the Legislature, and the Executive—discharge their responsibilities in a manner sensitive to the hopes and aspirations of the people. The Judiciary has been rightly accorded a very important role under the Constitution. Together, the Bench and the Bar have contributed immensely in strengthening the edifice of Rule of Law in our country. Yet, we all recognize that there are several areas of aberration and non-achievement, which warrant corrective action by all concerned. Judicial reforms, like reforms in other sectors of the administrative apparatus, have to be an on-going process. Such reforms, to have real meaning and relevance for our democracy, have to be people-centric.

In the specific context of our country, it is of crucial importance for the people to have a speedy and effective justice delivery system. The slow movement of the judicial process, the mounting arrears of cases and the lack of easy affordability and accessibility to the legal process, which many consider to be the bane of our judicial system today, make it imperative to address these issues urgently. As observed by one of the outstanding legal minds of post-Independence India, Nani Palkhivala:

> ...I am not aware of any country in the world where litigation goes on for as long a period as in India. Our cases drag over a length of time which makes eternity intelligible. The law may or may not be an ass, but in India it is certainly a snail and our cases proceed at a pace which would be regarded as unduly slow in a community of snails. Justice has to be blind but I see no reason why it should be lame: here it just hobbles along, barely able to walk.

The gravity of the problem was recognized by the Supreme Court as early as in 1979, when it observed in the *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar Case* that 'speedy trial is of essence to criminal justice and there can be no doubt that the delay in trial by itself constitutes denial of justice.' As per available information, there were 34,24,518 cases pending as on 30 June 2005 in various High Courts. The Subordinate Courts had a pendency of over 24 million cases. This, indeed, is a matter of grave concern. On the positive side, the pendency of cases in the Supreme Court of India had come down from nearly one lakh in 1991 to about 34,000 in November 2005. Even the Apex Court has to grapple with a large number of cases, which are pending for 5, 10 or 20 years. The delay in our criminal justice system is a matter of grave concern and there is a growing feeling among the people that dispensation of justice can be affected or frustrated by people of means and of questionable integrity.

Our immediate priority, therefore, must be to devise some definite action plan for a time-bound clearance of arrears in our Courts. It is encouraging to note that the recent initiative to introduce Fast Track Courts to speedily dispose of pending criminal cases, is beginning to produce results. As per the facts presented to Parliament last year, the nearly 1,600 Fast Track Courts, made functional so far, have disposed of nearly 8 lakh cases out of the 15.28 lakh assigned to them. They must continue their work even more earnestly.

Another crucial area requiring our serious attention is on facilitating access to the higher Judiciary for the common people. Delays and the high cost of litigation for those who cannot afford it, sends a clear message that the best legal services are available only to the affluent and due access to the doors of higher judiciary is denied to the poor and the socially disadvantaged, thus undermining those people's faith in the institutions of our democracy.

We are all aware how difficult it is for a common man, a dismissed worker or a peasant uprooted from his land or a school teacher or an oppressed woman to approach the courts of law, for justice. It is, therefore, imperative to take steps to reach justice to the common people, for reducing the enormous costs of litigation including the fees payable to lawyers and to minimize the difficulty of access to the courts, particularly the higher courts, for those living in the rural areas and far-flung places. How many people can afford to approach the Supreme Court situated in the Capital city – far away from the reach of the common people, who have no possibility to have access there? As the eminent jurist, M.C. Chagla stated: 'If sections of society are deprived of the benefits of law and are treated as second class citizens, or if the law does not protect the liberty of the individual, it would be meaningless to say that the rule of law prevails.'

I must confess that I am a votary of setting up Circuit Benches of our Apex Court at least in the three other metropolitan cities and also suitable number of Benches of the State High Courts at appropriate places in the States concerned. But some sections systematically resist such proposals. The reason cited for opposing such pro-people reforms is that such Benches would affect the integrity and unitary character of the Court and would lead to unsettled jurisdiction. To me, these reasons are unconvincing and seen from the angle of the magnitude of the problem of arrears, the advantages for the people would far outweigh the perceived difficulties. More than anything else, such initiatives will help in taking our justice-delivery system at different levels nearer as also cheaper for the people who are its real patrons and the intended beneficiaries.

The legal fraternity can also contribute significantly in strengthening the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism which is unfortunately slow in evolving in our legal system. Very often, resistance to people-oriented reforms comes from within our judicial system itself. Delay in filling up of vacancies in different High Courts should be a matter of genuine concern for all of us. I understand that out of a sanctioned strength of 675 judges for our High Courts, 121 were lying vacant as on 20 January 2006, *i.e.* almost one-fifth of the total strength. How does the system explain the significant hiatus in expectation and achievement? That in a country with one of the poorest population-judge ratio, even this sanctioned strength is not filled up with the deserving seriousness, is a matter of utmost concern for the common man as it is he who suffers on account of the inadequacies and imperfections in the system. The questions: who is responsible for the delay?; should we make the common man suffer for all these?; why is it that there is reluctance on the part of a section of our legal community to encourage ADR?, etc., need to be answered by everyone associated with the administration of justice in the country.

The people's experience of growing corruption in our justice-delivery system is most unfortunate and an extremely disturbing phenomenon. People's faith in the system can be sustained only if we take effective steps to promote integrity, impartiality and competence in the judiciary at all levels. Judges should be taken into the higher judiciary only after rigorous and impartial scrutiny. The prescription of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, one of the most outstanding jurists of our country, is quite pertinent to mention here. He said: '...a person who is not able to weep at the sight of human suffering and respond with quick compassionate action should not be chosen as a Judge.' The Supreme Court, as the head of our judicial system, should direct all High Courts to take necessary steps to identify and weed out corrupt elements ruthlessly. Corrupt, incompetent and indifferent people should not find a place in our judicial system.

Lawyers would do well to remember that their endeavours should be on constructive lines and that all their strategies should lead to improving the existing judicial institutions, enhancing the level of social justice and accelerating access to legal remedies based on equality. I believe that it would take the collective efforts of the Bench and the Bar to strengthen our justice delivery mechanism. It is also imperative that our legal education and training acquire a humanistic approach and evolve itself as an instrument for social change with a zeal to promote social justice. We should understand fully the socio-economic realities of our country, especially of the rural population and the role of law in the transformation of the rural societies.

The rising expectations of the people, if not adequately fulfilled, can undermine our democratic system itself. All these call for a paradigm shift on the part of our judicial system to make for speedy delivery of justice. Enhancing awareness in the processes of law and providing good quality legal education should be the concern of all. Today, we need lawyers trained and committed to take up programmes of law camps, mobile legal aids, Lok Adalats, etc. for providing quick legal remedies to the people. And I agree with my learned friend and legal luminary, Fali Nariman, when he says that 'it is in the field of remedies that equity must display the greatest inventiveness, providing relief in new situations as they arise, and primarily, it is for the Judiciary to devise adequate remedies to prevent injustice'.

While agreeing that part of the problem faced by our judicial machinery is systemic, we also have to be frank enough to admit that some notions have crept into the system at different levels out of a certain perceived role of the Judiciary in a parliamentary democratic set-up which have substantially enhanced the work-load. In my humble view, it is essential for all organs of the State and institutions including the Judiciary to have a clear and

unambiguous role-perception; otherwise there is a serious risk of entering into arenas which are otherwise clearly assigned to the other branches of the Government. It is a matter of introspection for the Judiciary as well. As a learned Judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Srikrishna, recently stated: 'In the name of judicial activism, modern day Judges in India have abandoned the traditional role of a neutral referee and have increasingly resorted to tipping the scales of justice in the name of distributive justice. The legitimacy of such actions needs critical appraisement at the hands of the legal fraternity.' He further, points out 'Political questions which were meant to be out-of-bounds for the Courts have often been thrown into the laps of Judges. Instead of throwing them back, the Courts have, with great enthusiasm, essayed into adjudication of such questions, often with unsatisfactory results.'

Of late, such judicial interventions are not limited to matters of executive action, but even issues of policy and matters which are otherwise in the exclusive jurisdiction of the other organs of the State are now included in its purview. We must recognize what Justice Srikrishna, stressed: 'the answers to many socio-economic and political problems lie with Parliament and in a polling booth and not in a courtroom,' and that misplaced activism 'strains the institutional resources of the court. It also diverts the time, talent and energy of Judges into channels that they are neither required to navigate, nor equipped to, for lack of competence, skill or resources.' Once the Judiciary gets involved with an issue which, otherwise comes within the Executive domain, it precludes the possibility of the Legislature exercising its own assigned role of ensuring Executive accountability through effective legislative scrutiny over such issue. One cannot disagree with the views expressed by yet another eminent jurist that: 'The Judiciary's task does not include an amorphous supervision of the Government.'

It is a universally recognized judicial maxim that the Courts should refrain from adjudicating issues or passing judgments on matters that would involve superintendence by the Court itself or what Justice Brennan called matters that cannot be adjudicated by judicially manageable standards. Such activism not only results in the marginalization of the Legislative and the Executive branches of the Government but also in unwittingly increasing the burden on the 'already creaking' judicial branch itself.

In fact, while dealing with Public Interest Litigation (PIL), the Judiciary often gets involved in the constitutionally defined domains of jurisdiction of the other organs of the Government. In the process the contours of 'Separation of Powers', clearly provided in our Constitution and essential for the smooth functioning of the system get blurred, and the constitutional balance comes under strain. Justice Srikrishna's warning of the inherent dangers of intrusions

into the domains of other branches of the Government merits serious attention:

> The Legislative and the Executive wings of the body politic, which possess the core competence and specialization in dealing with complex socio-economic problems, are getting progressively marginalized. The judicial organ of the State, the least equipped to deal with socio-politico-economic issues, has occupied the centre-stage, and has got bogged down in more and more of such cases. Sheer expediency or the urge for immediate justice in an abstract sense is hardly a justification for taking on problems with myriad fine details that the court is ill-equipped to handle.

Equally important are the views expressed by Justice Markanday Katju of the Supreme Court when he said: 'I do not subscribe to the view that Judiciary should be seen as running the Government. Everything is being raised through PILs. The Judiciary must know its limits, otherwise there would be a reaction' and that 'it has become a fashion to file PILs raising almost all matters before the Court which normally fall within the domain of the Executive.' Let us not forget the basic premise, as the learned jurist Fali Nariman says in his recent book on saving the legal system, that: ' Under our constitutional scheme the social, economic and political aspects of justice (stated in the Preamble) are left primarily to the Law-makers (Parliament and the State Legislatures). The entire legislative process, it is assumed, is influenced by considerations of justice and reason... .'

Dr. Harish Khare, a well-known journalist, in a recent article, while referring to some of the recent decisions and observations made by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, has stated as follows: 'From a mandate to interpret the law, the Courts have redefined their role as wanting to correct aberrations and shortcomings in every walk of life... From interpreting the law (and the Constitution), the Judiciary has expanded its brief to take a hand in formulating public policy... It is imperative to re-align the Judiciary with the same democratic obligations and restraints that are observed by other institutions. No institution can play so pivotal a role as the Judiciary does and yet remain beyond any kind of accountability, questioning or scrutiny. This non-accountability is good neither for the Judiciary nor for the democratic polity.'

To my mind, therefore, it would augur well for our system and serve the cause of effective and speedy justice delivery in the country if the principles of separation of powers are duly kept in mind. No doubt, our Judiciary has been playing its important constitutional role in preserving, protecting and promoting Fundamental Rights of the citizens, in many cases checking administrative lapses and curbing executive excesses. This is as it should be. But we should all endeavour to function in harmony with each other rather

than in conflict. It is important to recognize the need, as was reiterated by the Conference of the Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in March 2005, that 'there must exist mutual trust and respect between the Legislature and the Judiciary and also an understanding that they are not acting at cross purposes but striving together to achieve the same goal that is to serve the common man of this country and to make this country strong.'

The views expressed by none other than one of the most respected jurists of our time, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, should serve as an eye-opener for all of us associated with the legal profession in different ways:

I reflect on the quality of Judges and Lawyers and feel unhappy when I hear the still, sad music of humanity, victimized by injustice with nothing to console them except the round ocean and the blue sky. We want good Judges and good Lawyers if a fine justice system is to be the solace of the multitude of actual and potential litigants... The presiding Judge must overcome subconscious self-importance, omnipotence and prejudices, predilections and complex of convictions shared with uppish peers in social company... The lawyer of yesterday is elevated to be the Judge of today and spirals up by seniority or otherwise to the summit. If Lawyers are polluted and Judges contaminated, the institution collapses.

As we all know, the Constitution of India has promised every citizen justice – political, social and economic – and in order to fulfil this promise to our millions of poor, illiterate citizens spread over thousands of villages in our country, the legal fraternity does hold a great responsibility. Our judicial system sustains itself on our judges and our lawyers, who have to feel accountable to the people. The legal community must also not forget that the administration of justice derives its strength only from the confidence of the people in the system. The loss of that confidence can lead to instability and threaten the very edifice of democracy. If both the Bar and the Bench join together in restoring and consolidating the faith of the people in the system that we have put in place in the last six decades, they will be doing a great service to the strengthening of our legal edifice, and facilitating the Rule of Law and good governance in the country, thus striving to meet the expectations of the society. As many of the High Courts in our country celebrate their Golden Jubilee, it is indeed an appropriate time for the legal fraternity to introspect and at the same time look to the future with the courage of convictions on the imperative of safeguarding the Rule of Law.

I once again felicitate the High Court of Karnataka on this historic occasion as it crosses an important milestone in its existence. I am grateful to the organizers for giving me this opportunity to be amidst this august gathering.

Thank you.

SOCIAL CHANGE: ROLE OF PARLIAMENT AND THE JUDICIARY*

I deem it a great honour to be here amidst this august gathering at the function to mark the conclusion of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Andhra Pradesh High Court. At the outset, I am thankful to the Hon'ble Chief Justice Shri G. S. Singhvi, for his kind invitation, which has enabled me to take part in the Celebrations. One cannot but admire the commendable role of the Andhra Pradesh High Court in protecting and preserving the spirit of Rule of Law as also in contributing immeasurably, along with the State Legislature and the Government of Andhra Pradesh, to the process of social change in the State. I heartily congratulate the Hon'ble Chief Justice, his fellow Judges and the legal fraternity of the State of Andhra Pradesh on this historic occasion.

I am happy to take this opportunity to felicitate the people of Andhra Pradesh who are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the formation of the State and its Legislative Assembly. The creation of the State of Andhra Pradesh in 1956 was a significant event, providing the industrious and innovative people of this region an identity of their own, enabling them to chart out a distinct developmental path for themselves. The people of this State have shown great qualities of creative thinking, farsightedness and constructive vision in building and developing the State. Who can forget the remarkable contributions of the legendary leaders like Alluri Sitaram Raju, Potti Sree Ramulu, Swami Ramananda Teertha, P. Sundarayya, M. Basavapunnaiah, T. Nagi Reddy, V.V. Giri, Hanumantha Rao, Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, P.V. Narasimha Rao, N.T. Rama Rao, to name only a few. All these leaders influenced the society and politics of the State and, in many ways, of the nation as a whole. They continue to inspire and guide us even today in our endeavours towards building a strong and prosperous India. Successive Governments in the State have taken various proactive measures towards social engineering. Today, Andhra Pradesh is one of the most happening States of the country. Substantial progress has been achieved by the State, amongst others, in infrastructure development, information technology, science and technology as well as in industrial development. Hyderabad has emerged as one of the leading IT destinations in the country. The institutions of the

* At the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, Hyderabad (4 November 2006).

State, I am sure, will continue their efforts to make the benefits of socio-economic development available to all sections of the people, which is indeed an onerous task.

In a democratic polity, one of the crucial preconditions of good governance is the availability of an effective justice-delivery system. The Supreme Court, the High Courts and the Lower Courts are the medium through which the Constitution envisages the dispensation of justice. The Andhra Pradesh High Court, which was established in 1956, has, over the last fifty years, carved out a niche for itself as one of the progressive High Courts in our country. The Judges of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, many of whom were elevated to the Supreme Court of India, have strengthened the edifice of our jurisprudence and left behind a rich legacy which needs to be carried forward. All of us here would recall the name of Justice K. Subba Rao, who distinguished himself as the Chief Justice of the Apex Court of our country. Other Judges who were elevated to the Supreme Court and who distinguished themselves in that capacity include Justice P. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy, Justice B. P. Jeevan Reddy, Justice K. Rama Swamy, Justice K. Jayachandra Reddy, Justice M. Jagannadha Rao, Justice Syed Shah Mohammaed Quadri, and Justice P. Venkatrama Reddy. Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Banerjee, who was my junior while at the Bar in Calcutta, was appointed the Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh High Court, where, I understand, he made his mark until his elevation to the Supreme Court. I am sure, the high traditions set by these illustrious jurists will continue to inspire the present and future generations of the legal fraternity in the State.

In a society governed by the Rule of Law, the supremacy of law can be maintained with all its vigour if we are committed to treat and use law as an instrument of social change, the subject on which I wish to speak today. Law is the regulating and enhancing force that harmonizes diverse social interests, resolves conflicts and puts in place a meaningful framework for effecting social changes. Being an important component of a liberal society, it is an essential tool that democracies around the world have used successfully to dismantle obsolete social practices and pave the way for a progressive social as well as economic order. As a democratic norm, it guides us to move towards an egalitarian society and allows us to extend the benefits of socio-economic justice to all sections of society. Clearly, the intention of the framers of our Constitution was to outline the guiding principles of social change in our constitutional scheme rather than to go into their specifics. It was properly left to our representative institutions to comprehend the basic spirit of these guiding principles in its varied dimensions and provide the framework and the modalities of social engineering by way of pro-people legislations. That is the paramount social philosophy of our Constitution.

When India attained freedom in 1947, the biggest challenge before the framers of our Constitution was to emancipate the millions of our countrymen from the vicious web of age-old iniquities, the mind-set of a subject nation, mass poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment. They were quick to recognize that to remove the social and economic infirmities, there must be a close correlation between the various laws we enact for ourselves and our long time objectives and targets. They were also aware of the fact that if we fail to do so, there was every likelihood that the faith of the people in the democratic system would be undermined. To bring about inclusive development, they created different organs of the State and decided to establish a system in which the efforts of the various organs would subserve the norms of equality, liberty and Rule of Law, with the primary goal of promoting the orderly development of the nation and for providing speedy justice at affordable cost for our people. Accordingly, they envisaged a rich body of constitutional law, which was designed specifically to bring about social and economic transformation in a peaceful and democratic manner. We can only marvel at the sagacity of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who emphasized that democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness resulting in the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged. In a democracy, the fruits of development should be enjoyed by one and all equally and human dignity should remain inviolate under all circumstances. Dr. Ambedkar also rightly stressed that political democracy, bereft of economic and social democracy, would be meaningless.

The Constitution that we adopted for ourselves mirrors the supremacy of the people. The centrality of the will of the people finds its best expression in the Preamble itself, which also is the very source of all institutions of governance. The words, 'We, the People of India' and 'Do hereby Adopt, Enact and Give to Ourselves this Constitution' recognize the sovereignty of the people and their primacy in our constitutional system and convey its eternal message. It is in exercise of this sovereign power that we, the people, have given unto ourselves the Constitution making India a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic. Through the provisions of the Constitution, we have enumerated the powers and responsibilities of the organs of State to be the facilitators of social and economic restructuring of national life.

The framers of the Constitution had visualized that the Rule of Law should always remain at the very core of our national endeavour so that India could occupy a credible place as a country wedded to the modern notions of democracy in the comity of nations. Accepting the democratic norm was considered by them the guiding principle of our parliamentary scheme, laying down the basic parameters of our behaviour consistent with our constitutional framework. They believed that people occupying positions in different organs of the State and holding power should be guided by law

and not be allowed to act in an arbitrary or unlawful manner so that the common people can obtain the protection of law and there was equality so far as the people's rights and duties are concerned. It was only to guard against the abuse of powers that a constitutional structure of power-relationship with checks and balances was devised and safeguards provided for under our Constitution, whether expressly or by implication.

Our national leaders were of the opinion that excessive power, if vested with any of the three organs of State, could possibly undermine the foundations of democracy and, therefore, could impede the processes of people-centric social and economic change. Accordingly, they combined a judicious blend of checks and balances determining the functioning of our democratic organs in such manner that each one of them is required to function within its assigned limits, complementing and supplementing each other's efforts to provide, among other things, speedy justice to all. In fact, the idea of separation of powers and checks and balances are the two important pillars identified by our visionary Founding Fathers, in the Constituent Assembly, for the specific objective of securing a reasonable degree of equilibrium in the polity. In this constitutional scheme, it is the Parliament that enacts laws; the Executive implements them; and the Judiciary is the independent arbitrator interpreting them.

However, there is hardly any doubt that it is the Parliament that has been accorded the pre-eminent position to initiate and complete the process of social change. Being the supreme law-making body articulating the hopes, aspirations and grievances of the people, it promotes equity in the society and leads the process of human development.

It should always be borne in mind that the Constitution is the supreme organic law of our country giving direction to the organs of State as for societal transformation and progress. Apart from the Preamble itself, various articles of the Constitution, and more particularly the Chapters on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy, delineate a framework for securing the socio-economic uplift of our people. The utmost emphasis has been laid on equity, equality, dignity of the individual and the rights and duties of the citizens, with a duty to work specially for the benefit of the weaker and vulnerable sections of the society. Our Founding Fathers were conscious of the iniquitous social order which prevailed in our country, and the centuries old customs and practices which imposed inhuman disabilities on a vast segment of our people. Thus, special attention was given for the amelioration of their hardships.

The Constitution warranted that the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary should be sensitive to the concerns of these vulnerable sections and work harmoniously for their welfare and emancipation so that the task of

nation-building will be a coordinated venture. The fundamental law also recognized the wide array of diversities prevalent in our country, which called for special efforts from the organs of State to work in harmony. Our Constitution being people-centric, their elected representatives, out of whom the Executive Government emerged, have been given a special position of rights as well as duties in our constitutional scheme.

The Houses of Parliament and the Executive have the responsibility to give shape to the constitutional directives for social emancipation as well as for the overall development and progress of the country as a whole. Our Parliament has indeed worked as a vehicle of social engineering. Legislation being one important mechanism to bring about the necessary changes and to make adequate provision, our Parliament has enacted many progressive legislations with a view to providing just and humane conditions of work, maternity relief, living wages, participation of workers in the management of industries, public health, promotion of educational and economic interests, particularly of the weaker sections of society, welfare of children, bringing about land reforms and providing for employment generation among several other commendable initiatives. For such purposes, amendments to the existing legislations and even to some constitutional provisions, as provided in the Constitution itself, have also been made to keep pace with the requirement of the times.

Being the only body amongst the three organs of the State which is elected by the people, our Parliament has come to be identified, to be the pivot of our political system. It has been instrumental, while respecting the sanctity of the Constitution, in ensuring that the fundamental law of the land kept pace with the changing needs of a growing society by taking recourse to the constituent power bestowed on it as and when the situation so demanded and for taking initiative for many progressive legislations in the larger interest of the country.

Undoubtedly, the defining role of our Parliament in foreseeing and meeting the fast changing social needs of our people and in suitably modifying the existing laws emanates from the fact that it enjoys a well-defined constitutional status, legitimacy and popular base. In this context, it may also be taken note of that various other aspects of its powers and responsibilities also have a deep bearing on the process of social change. More importantly, as an agent of change and progress, it leads the society and moulds public opinion in favour of change. Some of the important legislative initiatives that have played a decisive role in empowering people across the country include the Constitution (Sixty-First Amendment) Act, 1988; the Right to Information Act, 2005; the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005; and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, etc.

Here, I may also refer to the various land reforms that have been undertaken over the years. When we achieved Independence in 1947, more than three-fourth of our people were engaged in agricultural activities for their livelihood. One of the major challenges before the national leadership was to introduce agrarian reforms to get rid of the iniquitous feudal order. In this crucial requirement, it was the Parliament and the State legislatures that took lead in abolishing *Zamindari* system and for transferring the ownership of the land to the actual tillers, for consolidating landholdings to make agriculture more productive, to mention only a few among several such initiatives. More importantly, many of these laws were put in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, which reflected the resolve of our Parliament to bring about socio-economic changes uninfluenced by technicalities and guided only by larger interests of the nation. Its initiative, to bring in some degree of equity in society and for people-oriented development also, cannot be overlooked. The nationalization of Banks in 1969, for taking the benefit of modern banking to the people at large and the bold initiative, in 1971, to abolish the Privy Purses, the powers and privileges incompatible with democracy enjoyed by a few, will make our Parliament the envy of many modern Parliaments.

Being a people's institution, Parliament has rightly been sensitive to the plight of various vulnerable sections of our society, particularly those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the other backward classes and communities. It has taken, from time to time, various steps to ameliorate their socio-economic conditions and has always been vigilant in matters concerning the implementation of constitutional safeguards provided for them. Parliament has passed several important laws concerning the welfare of persons belonging to these communities.

During the last six decades, our Parliament has made consistent endeavours to enforce parity between men and women in decision making. Rightly, therefore, it has passed various laws which are aimed at providing protection to women at the work place, against social discrimination, violence and atrocities, child marriages, dowry deaths, etc. Here I may refer to the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987; the amendments made from time to time to the Child Marriage (Restraint) Act, 1929; the National Commission for Women Act, 1990; and several other Acts, which have been enacted by the Parliament to improve the lot of women. More recently, as I said earlier, the Parliament passed the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. I may also refer to the Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments to the Constitution, which provided representation to women in civic bodies and municipalities. It is also pertinent to mention here the serious effort that has been going on at various levels to evolve a consensus on the draft Bill seeking to provide 33 per cent reservation for women in the Legislative bodies

in the State and the National Parliament. I hope, it will not be long before our Parliament adds a legislation to this effect to its long list of laws of far-reaching social significance which it has been instrumental in passing over the years.

Similarly, the problems of children and the working class have also been at the centre-stage of parliamentary initiatives. Realizing the importance of children in our society, it has enacted a number of acts, which deal with, among other things, the regulation of child workers, mandatory primary education, and other aspects of their welfare. Equally important were the large number of labour legislations in the country in the last nearly six decades. I may make a special mention to the Factories Act, the Mines Act, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, the Workmen's Compensation Act, the Payment of Gratuity Act, the Provident Fund Act, the Equal Remuneration Act, the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, and a large number of such other legislations which fall in the category of labour welfare and social security measures, like the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966; Persons with Disabilities, Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act, 1955; and the Maternity Benefits Act, 1961, contributed immensely in protecting the rights and interests of the working class in the country and in ensuring a dignified existence to them.

In an attempt to institutionalize the domain of social welfare, the Parliament has been instrumental in setting up a number of National Commissions through legislative initiatives. I may refer to the National Commissions for Scheduled Castes, for Scheduled Tribes, for Women, for Minorities, for Other Backward Classes and the National Human Rights Commission.

The Constitution imposes a sacred duty upon all the organs of State to be sensitive both to their creator, the Constitution, as also to the hopes and aspirations of the people for safeguarding whose interests they are created. When we view law as an instrument of social change, undoubtedly the role of every organ or functionary connected with law-making, their implementation and their interpretation come into focus. Only when everyone concerned work in tandem, internalizing the spirit of the laws, can the society get the desired benefit. If they work at cross purposes not only would that defeat the very purpose of such laws but would also result in confusion and disarray in society. Today we have situations when on the one hand, we find that people are increasingly becoming skeptical about vital institutions of governance primarily because they feel that the institutions are not coming up to their expectations, and on the other, there is a perception that even the institutions themselves are not contributing towards mutually sustaining or enhancing the people's respect towards them. As public functionaries, all of us have to seriously ponder over this situation.

Often, we come across instances wherein the legislative intent is eroded by one or the other organ of State which is not a very healthy development. The civil service, which is the implementing agency of the Government, has to be sensitive to the collective wisdom of the elected representatives of the people who have sanctified a policy or a programme and sanctioned money for the purpose. The hurdles and bottlenecks that are erected to subvert legislative intent, goes against the spirit of the Constitution. We also come across instances when the legislative intent is questioned by decisions given by various judicial bodies which does not go with the constitutional directives. Several critical issues like agrarian reforms, policies for protective discrimination in favour of the weaker and the vulnerable sections of the society, etc., have seen differing perceptions between the Legislature and the Judiciary in the country. For the healthy functioning of our parliamentary system, it is important to recognize the constitutionally assigned roles of the different organs of the State. The Constitution empowers the Legislature to enact laws. Judge-made legislations will not have the sanctity attached to the legislations enacted by the elected representatives of the people. After all, the sovereign will of the people is embodied in the supreme legislative institution of the country. In this context, I may refer to the wise words of one of the outstanding jurists of our times, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, who has expressed this feeling poignantly in the following words:

> A certain lofty courtesy, innocent of measly rivalry, must inform and illumine the mutuality between the Legislature and the Judiciary. Judge power is central to the constitutional order and the Legislature must deal with reverence towards the Judiciary. Judicial independence and immunity are unassailable. This is fundamental. At the same time, the House in the large measure has a representative character and the court can never act as a third chamber of the House, even though it has the power to strike down an unconstitutional legislation and pronounce upon excesses outside the legislative chamber.

I am also reminded of the words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in the Provisional Parliament on 22 September 1951, when he said:

> Customs prevailing in the society are, no doubt, important but customs are not static. They keep on changing. Obvious, in a democracy, Parliament can play an important role in changing customary law. In earlier days when the institution of Parliament was non-existent, people regulated their life by making their own customs. But today this work rightfully belongs to Parliament and to no one else...to say that nowhere custom could be altered, amended and changed is really to abrogate the authority of Parliament.

The members of Parliament are accountable to the people at all times as ordained by our Constitution. Their grassroot experience equips them to have a better understanding of societal needs and sensitivities. This social dimension enables them to proactively attempt to have a critical appraisal of the Government's legislative intent. Their understanding of the growing social needs finds reflection in Parliament every time a legislation is brought before it.

It is, therefore, necessary that all the organs of the State see various legislations in their social contexts, keeping in mind the larger social philosophy of our Constitution. Social legislations are not an area for classic interpretation only, but a means of emancipating the countless millions who still stand on the periphery of progress. To construe law in its social dimension, it thus becomes necessary that everyone comprehends it in its true social spirit, its setting and social history, and is motivated by the larger public good.

It is important to note that unfortunately, there have been several instances when efforts have been made to erode, if not subvert the authority of Parliament in enacting social legislations. In the process, the fine balance envisaged in the Constitution among the organs of State has been breached. It is in this context that I would like to refer to the issue of 'Public Interest Litigation', which has, in the recent past, raised doubts and confusion in the minds of the people about the respective domains of the different organs of the State. Let me, however, add here that I have no doubt whatsoever that the PIL, if used with the objective with which it was initially adopted in the 1980s, is an effective mechanism to sustain the faith of the poor and the disadvantaged people in the administration of justice and in the Rule of Law. If, however, resorting to novel methods of adjudication interferes with the discharge of its primary functions of dispensation of justice, I feel, we need to reconsider the whole gamut of the matter and come up with ways and means to address the issues involved. This would call for serious introspection on the part of all institutions of governance in our country.

Friends, we are already into the third millennium. Remarkable developments of a far-reaching nature are impacting the lives of our nation and people as never before. In an increasingly globalized world, the institutions of the State have a pivotal role to play in facilitating social change. This is particularly so in the case of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society like ours. In spite of nearly six decades of Independence, we are still confronted by a plethora of problems—social, economic and political. At the same time, the expectations of the people are rising. If we fail to live up to these rising expectations of the masses, the consequences can be calamitous. Socio-economic democracy, as envisioned by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the

other Founding Fathers, still remains a distant dream. It can be ensured only when the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary work in tandem. If we have to actualize such noble vision, all of us have to work harmoniously for the welfare of the people.

I am sure the legal fraternity of Andhra Pradesh is fully conscious of the myriad challenges before the nation and our people and will continue to shoulder their onerous responsibilities with renewed vigour as also commitment to the constitutional principles and ideals, especially the one to establish an egalitarian society.

May I once again compliment the Hon'ble Chief Justice, and Hon'ble Judges of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, on the Golden Jubilee of this revered Institution. I trust that the people of this State as also those belonging to the other parts of the country will be benefited by the wisdom behind various judgments rendered by the Hon'ble Andhra Pradesh High Court. I wish to convey once more my gratitude to the Hon'ble Chief Justice, the High Court of Andhra Pradesh and its Advocates' Association for the opportunity provided to me to share my thoughts with this distinguished gathering here.

Thank you.

SEPARATION OF POWERS AND JUDICIAL ACTIVISM*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver the lecture instituted in the memory of Dr. Kailash Nath Katju, an eminent freedom fighter and a great jurist and administrator. As a Minister in the erstwhile United Provinces, as a Union Minister handling the important portfolios of Home, Law and Defence in the early years of our Republic, as the Governor of Orissa and later of West Bengal and as the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, he left an indelible imprint of his personality on the diverse fields with which he was associated. I take this opportunity to pay my respectful homage to his memory and wish to compliment the trust named after him for organizing the Lecture Series.

Dr. Kailash Nath Katju was a colossus in the field of law and was known for his sharp intellect, objective approach and great oratorial skills. He was acknowledged as one of the most successful lawyers in the Allahabad High Court in the pre-independence years, who had set the highest standards of efficiency and integrity. A lawyer of outstanding ability and acumen, his brilliance and mastery of the intricacies of law and procedure placed him in a distinctive position among most of his contemporaries.

A person with a broad outlook, Dr. Katju had a deep and abiding concern for the poor and the downtrodden and was indeed one of the makers of post-independence India. He was an ardent champion of democratic principles and always considered himself to be accountable in the discharge of his public duties.

As a tribute to his memory as a jurist of eminence, concerned and committed to the orderly and healthy functioning of the democratic system in the country, I have decided to speak, as was also suggested by the trust, on the subject, "Separation of Powers and Judicial Activism in India", which is a theme of great relevance, particularly, in the context of the growing feeling among various sections of the country's socio-political spectrum, of the need to have a healthy debate and discussion on the power and responsibilities of the different organs of our Constitution.

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* At the Dr. K.N. Katju Memorial Lecture on *Separation of Powers and Judicial Activism in India*, New Delhi (26 April 2007).

However, I approach the subject with considerable trepidation, because it has been felt in some quarters that the present Speaker of the Lok Sabha is indulging in the criticism of the Judiciary for allegedly encroaching into the powers of the Legislature and the Executive and a periodical has even gone to the extent that the Speaker has 'fired the first salvo' against the Judiciary for its activism. If I may humbly say that I yield to none in holding the Judiciary in highest respect and I am proud of the manner in which our Judiciary has been discharging its paramount function of judicial review. Having spent nearly half a century in courts of law as a lawyer and having been in the Parliament for nearly four decades, I am convinced that there is no need for nor there exists any confrontation between the Judiciary and the Legislature. Of late, a view has been expressed and rightly, if I may say so, in many quarters that it was desirable to have a proper debate and discussion on some of the fundamental issues concerning the state of our nation, including in particular, on the relationship between the three organs of the State.

As a matter of fact, in recent times, opinions have been expressed on some of the related issues by eminent persons, including learned Judges, past or present, distinguished lawyers and leading media persons. Hon'ble Mr. Justice B.N. Srikrishna, while being a Member of the Apex Court, Hon'ble Shri J.S. Verma, former Chief Justice of India in separate Lectures and in a publication *'The Supreme Court vs. the Constitution—A Challenge to Federalism'*, edited by Sri Pran Chopra, the well-known journalist and distinguished former Chief Justices, Justice Ahmadi and Justice Anand, Shri Kuldip Nayar and many other eminent persons from different walks of life, have thrown considerable light on the issues involved. I have taken the liberty of quoting from a few of those writings and observations in this lecture.

As is well-known, the doctrine of separation of powers, is an inseparable part of the evolution of democracy itself. The French philosopher Montesquieu drew the attention of political theorists to the dangers inherent in the concentration of the Legislative, the Executive and the Judicial powers, in one authority and stressed on the necessity of the concept of checks and balances in constitutional governance. His writings considerably influenced the views and thoughts of the framers of many modern Constitutions. No democracy indeed contemplates conferment of absolute power in any single authority.

Separation of powers with the system of checks and balances is one of the most characteristic features of our constitutional scheme. As has been observed by the Hon'ble Chief Justice Balakrishnan, 'the Constitution lays down the structure and defines the limits and demarcates the role and function of every organ of the State including the Judiciary and establishes norms for their inter relationships, checks and balances.'

Our institutions of governance have been intentionally founded on the principle of separation of powers as a bulwark against tyranny of any or more organs of the State and the Constitution does not give any unfettered power to any organ and all the three principal organs are expected to work in harmony 'in a joint and participatory role ... instead of an exclusive primacy of any one in the process', to quote former Chief Justice J.S. Verma. He has further observed that the basic constituent principle of the Indian polity is that no single public functionary will have absolute power, which is anathema in a democracy.

The obvious consideration before the Constituent Assembly was to preserve and protect the freedom and democratic rights of the people and the supremacy of the popular will in our system of governance. The centrality of the will of the people finds its best expression in the Preamble of the Constitution itself. The words, 'We, the People of India' and 'do hereby Adopt, Enact and Give to ourselves this Constitution' recognize the sovereignty of the people and their primacy in our constitutional system and convey its eternal message. It is in exercise of this sovereign power that we, the people, have given unto ourselves the Constitution making India a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic. And, through the provisions of the Constitution, we have enumerated the powers and responsibilities of the organs of the State to be the facilitators of national weal, leaving hardly any scope for doubt or confusion in the mutual relationship.

To quote Chief Justice Verma, 'The sovereign will of the people finds expression through their chosen representatives in the Parliament ... The real political Executive is the Council of Ministers, which also controls the Lok Sabha, wherein lies the real legislative power. Parliament exercises political and financial control over the Executive, and there are inherent checks and balances to keep every organ within the limits of constitutional power. The grey areas are meant to be covered by healthy conventions developed on the basis of mutual respect keeping in view the common purpose to be served by the exercise of that power'.

The Legislature has been accorded a pre-eminent position in our constitutional and political set-up, with power *inter alia*, to make laws, to exercise control over the nation's purse, to make the Executive accountable to the popular House, and when considered necessary, also to amend the Constitution. But obviously the Legislature has to function within the parameters laid down by the Constitution.

The framers of our Constitution took infinite care to provide for an independent and impartial Judiciary as the interpreter of the Constitution and as the custodian of the rights of the citizens through the process of judicial review, which gives the mandate to the judiciary to interpret the laws

but, if I may humbly submit, not to make them, nor to lay down general norms of behaviour for the Government or to decide upon public policy. The concept is 'judicial review' and not 'judicial activism' which is of recent coinage and extends, as one finds, much beyond review. The scope of judicial review is confined to the enquiry as to whether an impugned legislation or an executive action falls within the competence of the Legislature or of the Executive authority or is consistent with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution or with its other mandatory provisions.

The Constitution does not contemplate a super-organ nor confers an over-riding authority on any one organ. No organ has any power to superintend over the exercise of powers and functions of another, unless the Constitution strictly so mandates. It is obvious that all organs of the State should act only according to the constitutional mandate and should not be astute to find any undisclosed source of power or authority to expand its own jurisdiction, which will give rise to avoidable conflicts and affect the harmonious functioning of the different organs of the State.

Intervening in the debate in the Constituent Assembly, many learned members had expressed the view that the doctrine of judicial independence was not to enable the Judiciary to function as a kind of a 'super Legislature' or a 'super Executive'. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, while speaking in the Constituent Assembly, observed:

> No Supreme Court and no Judiciary can stand in judgment over the sovereign will of Parliament, representing the will of the entire community. If we go wrong here and there, it can point it out, but in the ultimate analysis, where the future of the community is concerned, no Judiciary can come in the way... ultimately the fact remains that the Legislature must be supreme and must not be interfered with by the Court of law in measures of social reforms.

In the early years of the Republic, the Supreme Court had already recognized that the Indian Legislature had a distinctly superior position *vis-a-vis* the other organs of the State. The observations of the then Justice S. R. Das, who later adorned the office of the Chief Justice of India with great lustre, in the famous case of *A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras* (1950 SCR 88) made it very clear:

> Although our Constitution has imposed some limitations ... [it] has left our Parliament and the State Legislature supreme in their respective legislative fields. In the main, subject to limitations ... our Constitution has preferred the supremacy of the Legislature to that of the Judiciary... and the Court has no authority to question the wisdom or policy of the law duly made by the appropriate Legislature ... and this is a basic fact which the Court must not overlook.

Similarly, commenting on the nature of separation of powers delineated by our Constitution, the Hon'ble Chief Justice B.K. Mukherjee, one of the most eminent Judges of the Supreme Court, in *Ram Jawaya Kapur v. State of Punjab* (AIR 1955 SC 549) observed that: 'our Constitution does not contemplate assumption, by one organ or part of the State, of functions that essentially belong to another.'

However, of late, it is being noticed that the lines demarcating the jurisdiction of the different organs of the State are getting blurred, as a section of the Judiciary seems to be of the view that it has the authority by way of what is described as 'judicial activism' to exercise powers, which are earmarked by the Constitution for the Legislative or the Executive Branches. However, one may point out that the Hon'ble Supreme Court has itself construed that the concept of Separation of Powers is a 'basic feature' of the Constitution. That being so, necessarily, each organ of the State has separate areas of functioning, into which no other organ can enter or intervene, unless permitted by the Constitution itself, and if it so does, it will be contrary to one of the 'basic features' of our Constitution and that includes the Judiciary also.

There was a lot of appreciation when our Supreme Court was pleased to hold that justice can be provided, through an innovative procedure, to the oppressed citizens, especially those belonging to the vulnerable sections of the community, who have no means, no facilities and, in fact, no possibility on their own to approach the Court, even in cases of glaring injustice and discrimination, by giving a liberal meaning to the concept of *locus standi*, without in any way, entering into the areas preserved for the Legislature or the Executive.

But today, there is a considerable feeling even in well-meaning quarters that we have travelled a long way from that objective. On many occasions, the Hon'ble Supreme Court itself has felt it necessary to condemn motivated and frivolous approaches to Court in the garb of Public Interest Litigation (PIL), which goes much beyond the scope of Judicial Review. By way of warning, Chief Justice Verma had drawn attention to 'the deliberate misuse of the judicial process by some vested interests to settle political scores, or to shift the responsibility to the judiciary for deciding some delicate political issue found inconvenient by the political executive for decision.'

No one can take exception to any decision in the exercise of Judicial Review (subject, of course, to the provision of review or appeal, where it lies) invalidating any law or Executive action, but where it seeks to lay down some new policy to be adopted or actions to be taken and uses its supposed power to compel Executive action on the same without any known authority or procedure, serious questions necessarily arise about the source of such

power. Chief Justice Verma has expressed the view that 'Judicial activism should be neither judicial ad-hocism nor judicial tyranny and that while commanding performance by the concerned authority, the judiciary should not take over the function itself, as it will not be a legitimate judicial intervention, which can only be when it comes within the scope of permissible judicial review.'

Now-a-days, there are umpteen instances where Judiciary has intervened in matters entirely within the domain of the Executive, including policy decisions. As the learned Chief Justice Verma has pointed out:

> ....Judiciary has intervened to question a 'mysterious car' racing down the Tughlaq Road in Delhi, allotment of a particular bungalow to a Judge, specific bungalows for the Judge's pool, monkeys capering colonies to stray cattle on the streets, cleaning public conveniences, and levying congestion charges at peak hours at airports with heavy traffic, etc., under the threat of use of contempt power to enforce compliance of its orders. Misuse of the contempt power to force railway authorities to give reservation in a train is an extreme instance.

Recently, a media correspondent has compiled a list of issues and matters in which the Courts have apparently, if not clearly, strayed into Executive domain or in matters of policy. He noted that the orders passed by the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi in recent times dealt with subjects ranging from age and other criteria for nursery admissions, unauthorized schools, criteria for free seats in schools, supply of drinking water in schools, number of free beds in hospitals, on public land, use and misuse of ambulances, requirements for establishing a world class burns ward in the hospital, the kind of air Delhiites breath, begging in public, the use of sub-ways, the nature of buses we board, the legality of constructions in Delhi, identifying the buildings to be demolished, the size of speed-breakers on Delhi roads, auto-rickshaw over-charging, growing frequency of road accidents and enhancing of road fines. And I am sure, there are umpteen such instances in the records of other High Courts as well.

The *Jagdambika Pal case of 1998*, involving the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly, and the *Jharkhand Assembly case of 2005*, to my mind, are two glaring examples of deviations from the clearly provided constitutional scheme of separation of powers. The Interim Order of the Supreme Court in these two cases, to my mind, upset the delicate constitutional balance between the Judiciary and the Legislature. I feel that these were instances of unfortunate intrusion by the Supreme court into well-demarcated areas of powers of the Legislatures, contrary to the provisions of Articles 122 and 212 of the Constitution. Chief Justice Verma has recently described the orders in the Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand cases as judicial aberrations and has expressed his hope that the Supreme Court would soon correct them.

I do agree that there is some cynicism among our people about the way our institutions function, particularly the Parliament and the Executive. Many a time the Judiciary is applauded for its interventions in forcing the arm of the Executive to do certain things or in restraining it from doing certain things. People appreciate it, at least, that is what the media reports. Criticisms of the Executive and Legislatures, from time to time, have been made from the Bench in very strong words while hearing what are described as Public Interest Litigations (PIL). A former Chief Justice of India has been reported to have observed from the Bench that the Legislature in India has not done anything worthwhile in the last thirty years, or something to that effect.

In my humble view, the contention that the Judiciary should take on itself the onerous responsibility of the governance of the country, in matters, which the Constitution has imposed on either the Executive or Legislature, has serious implications. In a democracy, where Rule of Law and not laws of men prevail, for its every action or inaction, the Executive authority must be and is accountable to the people. But where the Judiciary interferes with policy decisions of the Executive and takes decisions clearly of administrative nature, I feel that it may then be proper to ask: is the Judiciary accountable to anyone for the discharge of functions of Executive nature and what are the constitutional and legal sanctions behind such orders made and directions given by courts, by way of judicial activism?

Hon'ble Justice Srikrishna, as a Judge of the Supreme Court, observed very appropriately that 'In the name of judicial activism, modern day Judges in India have abandoned the traditional role of a neutral referee and have increasingly resorted to tipping the scales of justice in the name of distributive justice. The legitimacy of such actions needs critical appraisement at the hands of the legal fraternity.' Further, his Lordship pointed out that 'Political questions which were meant to be out-of-bounds for the courts have often been thrown into the laps of Judges. Instead of throwing them back, the courts have, with great enthusiasm, essayed into adjudication of such questions, often with unsatisfactory results.'

As the former Chief Justice of India, Justice Ahmadi has stated that sometimes this activism has the potential to transcend the borders of judicial review and turn into populism and excessivism. 'Activism', according to him, 'is populism when doctrinal effervescence transcends the institutional capacity of the Judiciary to translate the doctrine into reality, and it is excessivism when a court undertakes responsibilities normally discharged by other coordinate organs of the Government.'

Shri Soli Sorabjee, former Attorney General of India and a known votary of judicial activism, pointed out that 'undoubtedly there have been at times judicial aberrations. This cannot be avoided because infallibility has not been divinely guaranteed to the judges.' One may ask then what is the redress against such aberrations? If there is Legislative and Executive aberrations, the Judiciary can exercise its power of Judicial Review to correct the same though not by substituting its own decisions in matters within Executive or Legislative domain. After stating that even if there is malfunctioning in the House of Parliament, the Judiciary cannot interfere with the internal functioning of the Parliament, Shri Sorabjee admits that 'problems really stem from the Judiciary's role in entertaining Public Interest Litigation petitions. Some orders and directions passed are beyond the judicial sphere and at times smack of judicial adventurism... Judges must withstand the temptation of publicity and also rid themselves of the belief that the Judiciary alone can solve all the problems that afflict our nation and remember that PIL is not a pill for every ill... friction can be avoided if each organ of the state correctly understands and respects the constitutional functions of the other organs.'

Justice A.S. Anand, former Chief Justice of India, also observed that 'Courts have to function within the established parameters and constitutional bounds. Decisions should have a jurisprudential base with clearly discernible principles ... Courts have to be careful to see that they do not overstep their limits because to them is assigned the sacred duty of guarding the Constitution... Policy matters, fiscal, educational or otherwise, are thus best left to the judgment of the executive. The danger of judiciary creating a multiplicity of rights without the possibility of adequate enforcement will, in the ultimate analysis, be counter productive and undermine the credibility of the institution. Courts cannot 'create rights' where none exist nor can they go on making orders which are incapable of enforcement or violative of other laws or settled legal principles... With a view to see that judicial activism does not become 'judicial adventurism', the courts must act with caution and proper restraint. They must remember that judicial activism is not an unguided missile – failure to bear this in mind would lead to chaos... Public adulation must not sway the judges and personal aggrandizement must be eschewed. It is imperative to preserve the sanctity and credibility of judicial process. It needs to be remembered that courts cannot run the Government... The Judiciary should act only as an alarm clock but not as a time keeper. After ringing the alarm bell, it should ensure that the Executive has become alive to perform its duties.'

Shri Rajeev Dhavan, a leading lawyer of the Supreme Court, in a recent article in the media has observed that 'Public Interest Litigation was a wonderful tool to help the poor and the disadvantaged and to explore public

causes. But how far will the court go? Today, it is acting as the Ministry of Forests in the Godavarman case. No electricity line, school, project can be built in India without the Supreme Court's permission and its dreaded self-appointed committee which is a law unto itself ...' The Supreme Court must recognise that 'policy' is for the Government, and 'law' for the Court.' In connection with a recent matter, Shri Dhavan has further observed that 'for the Government, equality means social and economic opportunity for all. The Supreme Court protects merit, meritocracy and an elite equality. This is a very serious clash of ideology... about social justice—*albeit* with politicians seeking votes and the judges enjoying public attention.'

A leading journalist, Dr. Harish Khare, in a recent article, has stated that 'it goes without saying that judges have to resist the temptation of getting swayed by the political partisanship of the day. Judges do tend to render themselves vulnerable to such temptation given the selection process as also the creeping institutional arrogance... Public policy-making in such a situation entails difficult choices, invariably pitting one section of society against others. The Judiciary finds itself embroiled in the making (or unmaking) of these difficult choices, and the nature of judicial intervention is often defined less by any pronounced jurisprudential doctrine and more by the judge's personal predilections.'

Shri Anil Divan, a respected Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court and a strong supporter of judicial activism has observed recently that 'there is no doubt that sometimes these orders in 'PIL' are triggered by righteous indignation and emotional responses.' One may legitimately ask whether such feelings can justify judicial intervention in matters beyond its jurisdiction.

The Hon'ble Justice Markandey Katju of the Supreme Court has, while dealing with some matters before him, been reported to have observed that 'it has become a fashion to file PILs raising almost all matters before the court which normally fell within the domain of the executive. I do not subscribe to the view that Judiciary should be seen as running the Government. Everything is being raised through PILs. The Judiciary must know its limits, otherwise there would be a reaction.' While dealing with another petition, Mr. Justice Katju expressed his annoyance with the court's appropriating jurisdiction on all sorts of issues and that he would even lodge a formal complaint against the practice. He observed from the Bench as reported in the media that 'I am entitled to register my objection to entertainment of all sorts of PILs. Judges should exercise some self-restraint. The Supreme Court has become an authority on all subjects, be it health, education or even election. I am going to lodge my complaint.'

In a recent editorial in one of the leading national dailies, it has been stated that 'Judicial activism, by definition, tends to encroach. Like other

organs of civil society, the Judiciary should hold itself up for occasional introspection and consider whether restraint is actually the better part of intellectual valour'.

On 14 April 2007, it has been reported in the Press that a Bench of the Supreme Court while hearing a petition under PIL observed as follows:

> Courts cannot interfere with Government policies on the ground that a better, fairer or wiser alternative is available. Legality of the policy, and not the wisdom or soundness of the policy, is the subject of judicial review... Courts do not and cannot act as Appellate Authorities examining the correctness, suitability and appropriateness of a policy. Nor are courts advisors to the Executive on matters of policy which the Executive is entitled to formulate... The scope of judicial review when examining a policy... is to check whether it violates the Fundamental Rights of citizens or is opposed to provisions of the Constitution or opposed to any statutory provision or (is) manifestly arbitrary.

One wonders who is listening to these observations of the highest judicial authority in the country.

As Justice Srikrishna recognized in his Lecture that 'the answers to many socio-economic and political problems lie with Parliament and in a polling booth and not in a courtroom', and that such activism 'strains the institutional resources of the court. It also diverts the time, talent and energy of Judges into channels that they are neither required to navigate, nor equipped to, for lack of competence, skill or resources.'

Justice Srikrishna's warning of the inherent dangers in such intrusions into the domains of the other branches of the Government merits serious attention. He said:

> The Legislative and the Executive wings of the body politic, which possess the core competence and specialization in dealing with complex socio-economic problems, are getting progressively marginalized. The judicial organ of the State, the least equipped to deal with socio-politico-economic issues, has occupied the centre stage, and has got bogged down in more and more of such cases. Sheer expediency or the urge for immediate justice in an abstract sense is hardly a justification for taking on problems with myriad fine details that the court is ill-equipped to handle.

The above views of many eminent judges, learned lawyers and leading media persons, with which I humbly associate myself, emphasize important issues, which should be looked into, if I may say so, primarily by the Judiciary

itself as also by others. The concern has been expressed not by those associated with the Legislature and the Executive alone. With all humility and sincerity, I feel that there should be introspection by all the organs of the State, so that they can work harmoniously to strengthen our democratic set-up.

If I may submit, the responsibility for managing public affairs should be well left to those on whom the Constitution has imposed such obligation and for which, in the ultimate analysis, they are accountable to the people. This accountability is what differentiates democracy from other systems of governance. Discharge of Executive responsibilities by any other authority, howsoever highly placed, but non-accountable, is anathema in a democracy. There should be no assumption that any particular organ has any inherent superiority or a monopoly over concern for the people or that it alone can solve their problems. I believe that activism of any institution has to be, first and foremost, directed to the due discharging of its own basic and fundamental duties.

To my mind, what is required for any institution to perform most effectively is, to start with, a realistic role-perception within the broader systemic framework. Once the Judiciary gets involved with an issue, which falls within the Executive domain, it precludes the possibility of the Legislature exercising its assigned role of ensuring Executive accountability through effective Legislative scrutiny. It is important for the Judiciary to remind itself, if I may humbly submit, that its 'task does not include an amorphous supervision of the Government.' Let us not forget the basic premise, as Shri Fali Nariman says in his recent book *on Saving the Legal System*, that: 'Under our constitutional scheme, the social, economic and political aspects of justice (stated in the Preamble) are left primarily to the Law-makers (Parliament and the State Legislatures). The entire legislative process, it is assumed, is influenced by considerations of justice and reason... .'

It is often seen that the Judiciary is applauded for its 'activism'. The issue involved, however, is more serious than perception of a section of the people, who have access to the media. It is about the very basis of our constitutional scheme of power-relationship. Self-restraint is the primary balancing element in the exercise of judicial power. Justice Frankfurter of the US Supreme Court reiterated this in the *Trope v. Dulles (1958)*, when he said:

> ... it is not the business of this Court to pronounce policy. It must observe a fastidious regard for limitation on its own power, and this precludes the Court's giving effect to its own notions of what is wise or politic. That self-restraint is of the essence in the observation of the judicial oath, for the Constitution has not authorized the justices to sit in judgment on the wisdom of what Congress and the Executive branch do.

The people occupy the pivotal position in any democratic set-up, as democracy draws its strength from the sovereignty of the people. The people's representatives decide what laws have to be enacted for the governance of the country. The Council of Ministers has to execute the policies and programmes through the Executive set-up. The Legislature has the inalienable constitutional right to scrutinize and oversee the functioning of the Executive and require the Executive authorities to act according to the laws framed by the Legislature and the policies and programmes that have its sanction. Elaborate procedures have been laid down for the Legislature to discharge such functions of enforcing the accountability of the Executive to it and through the elected representatives, to the people themselves. Obviously, the Judiciary is not accountable to the Legislature for orders of executive nature or which are in legislative domain passed by way of judicial activism.

The provisions of the Chapter IV of Part V of our Constitution dealing particularly with the Union Judiciary clearly provide for a close relationship between the Judiciary and the Legislature, not in a manner of controlling each other but of a mutually complementary relationship, which should necessarily be based on harmony between the two most important organs of the State.

Under Article 140, it is the Parliament which by law make provision for conferring upon the Supreme Court such supplementary powers not inconsistent with any of the provisions of the Constitution as may appear to be necessary or desirable for the purpose of enabling the Court more effectively to exercise the jurisdiction conferred upon it by or under this Constitution.

Article 142(1) of the Constitution provides that any decree passed or order made by the Supreme Court shall be enforceable throughout the territory of India in such manner as may be prescribed by or under any law made by Parliament and, until provision in that behalf is so made, in such manner as the President may by order prescribe.

I would humbly refer to what I consider some very important issues in connection with the exercise of an activist role of the Judiciary: (i) What are the laws, legal principles or authorities which will be applied or followed by the Judiciary in deciding matters which will require exercise of jurisdiction assigned to some other organ or authority? Would that depend on the *ipse dixit* of the learned judge or judges when the matter is *res integra*? and (ii) What is the method or procedure provided by the Constitution or any law for enforcement of such orders? In the absence of any procedure under any law made by the Parliament for enforcement of orders made in the PIL, relating to Executive or Legislative matters, can the Courts enforce such orders by adopting novel methods like appointing Monitoring Committees, thus themselves entering into the arena or by taking recourse to the jurisdiction

in terrorem, namely, the power to punish for contempt of court? I believe that the nation is entitled to know the answers.

I humbly submit that for any organ or authority under the Constitution, to enjoy any power, not specifically or by clear implication conferred by the Constitution, the source of power is or can be only the Parliament and no other authority. As has been held, the Supreme Court can declare the law and cannot enact law. Almost all votaries of judicial activism, including the Hon'ble Judges themselves, while exercising power in such assumed jurisdiction justify it on the supposed failure of the Legislature or the Executive authorities in taking proper action to mitigate the people's grievances or to find solutions to people's problems.

But with regard to dispensation of justice, how many ordinary citizens of the country, who are oppressed and subjected to various forms of discrimination and denial of rights, particularly women who are victims of torture and exploitation, can have access to the Courts, specially the highest court of our country, if he or she needs to approach the Courts or contest effectively proceedings initiated against them? How many dismissed employees, how many victimized teachers, how many senior citizens, how many disadvantaged people staying in far flung areas of the country, who would need to seek justice can approach the Apex Court of our country? The geographical distance, prohibitive cost of litigation, inordinately long time taken for disposal of matters, discourage or otherwise make it impossible for ordinary litigants to approach the Court. The situation should disturb the nation's conscience.

The large number of arrears pending in almost all the courts is affecting the people's faith in our justice-delivery system. These issues require to be given very serious attention not only by the Legislature or the Executive but also by the Judiciary. One has to admit that in many instances, the Judiciary (without attributing any fault to it) is not able to cater to the needs of the common people of the country in adequate measure. Now, in such a case, can any other organ of the State take up on itself the right to exercise judicial powers on the plea that Judiciary has not adequately been able to do so? Obviously neither the Legislature nor the Executive can do so, because it has no such power under the Constitution. We can assess the validity of some contentions by extreme examples. So, in my submission, no organ under the Constitution can take upon itself the function of any other organ on the ground that there is supposed malfunctioning or non-functioning or inadequate functioning of that particular organ.

It is my earnest hope that, both in letter and spirit, the constitutional scheme of separation of powers and, with it, the checks and balances, that are indispensable to democratic governance, will be respected, and the spirit of

moderation and mutual respect, animated by a common commitment to the Constitution will be applied in all cases for improving the social and economic condition of our people. The principle of separation of powers, clearly provided for in our Constitution, to my mind, is not an optional feature to be selectively recognized by the organs of the State, but is one of the most essential directives of our Constitution, which has to inform every aspect of administration in the country. Otherwise, the constitutional basis of our Republic and the credibility of our democratic institutions itself will be questioned, as they are now, which will not strengthen due governance of the country.

In a democratic set-up, the space and role of every institution is expected to be clearly earmarked in the Constitution that creates it. It is in the effective discharge of those functions, that it serves the people for whom the institutions are meant. This can be accomplished without intruding into or trivializing the role of the co-ordinate institutions or without undermining the importance of fundamental democratic processes. To my mind, when institutions succeed in functioning strictly within the domain assigned to each, not only do they grow in public esteem, but they also create the ideal conditions for the effective functioning of the entire system.

The commitment and sensitivity to democratic values, demonstrated by our Founding Fathers and other leaders in the formative years of our Republic and also by our Apex Court, have all contributed immensely to the building up of the democratic edifice in the country over the decades. When, during a tumultuous period of our history, the Judiciary had left the citizens, at the mercy of the Executive with 'diamond bright' and 'diamond hard' hope for protection of their constitutional rights, which were being blatantly abused by the administrative machinery of the State, but perceived by some elements in the Judiciary as something as good as 'maternal care' and as such chose to look the other way, when the ordinary citizens would have needed their support the most, it was the later Parliament itself that was elected by the people at the earliest opportunity through free democratic elections that finally restored the basic rights of the people and put in place stronger defences for our democracy and for safeguarding the interest of the citizens through the 44th Constitution Amendment Act in 1978. No other institution could match that capacity for alertness and collective sensitivity to popular feelings.

In conclusion, I reiterate that there is definitely sufficient space in our system for all the institutions to co-exist and work together for the common weal. As I have repeatedly said, the people look up to the courts, which are temples of justice, with great expectation, hope and confidence. Similarly, people look up to the Parliament and State Legislatures, of which the Executive is a part, with as much, if not more, expectation and hope, because under the

Constitution, the Parliament is the supreme legislative institution of the country, the people's institution par excellence, through which laws for the people are made and Executive accountability is enforced. We must recognize that Constitution is the supreme law and no organ of State should go beyond the role assigned to it by the Constitution. It is the duty of all concerned, including the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary, to ensure that this balance is scrupulously adhered to. No organ can be the substitute of another. Visionary leaders like Dr. Katju strove all through their life to preserve and protect this lofty ideal of our constitutional system, an ideal which needs repeated reiteration, as it has an eternal bearing on our parliamentary polity and constitutional and democratic framework.

With these words, I once again pay my humble tributes to Dr. Kailash Nath Katju. I would also like to convey my gratitude to Justice Markandey Katju and the other members of the Dr. Kailash Nath Katju Memorial Trust for their kind invitation to me to associate with this lecture series.

Thank you.

CHALLENGES BEFORE INDIAN JUDICIARY*

It is an honour and privilege for me to have been invited to be the Chief Guest at the Annual Convocation of the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences. I am thankful to the respected Vice-Chancellor for asking me to deliver the Convocation Address.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that the University, which is the brainchild of our former Chief Minister, the revered Shri Jyoti Basu, has earned considerable reputation as one of the premier Institutions of legal education in our country within a short period. I have some personal satisfaction that as a member of the Syndicate of the Calcutta University, I had mooted the proposal for introducing a five year course for the study of law in our University, so that from a rather unsatisfactory system of legal education then prevailing with part-time courses and part-time lecturers, we could have a course of study which would provide quality education in our State ensuring that the students get the best theoretical and practical knowledge of law, which will give them a strong foundation of the 'basic legal principles.' Now that this Institution has already made its mark in different areas of its course of study, the University and the authorities and the students deserve compliments for their achievements. I would particularly like to convey my deep appreciation of the Journal *Indian Juridical Review* published by the Student Juridical Association of the University, which is indeed of international standard. The Association and particularly the Student Editors deserve full compliments.

The objects for which the University has been set up are laid down in the related statute creating the University which, *inter alia*, provides that the same 'shall be to advance and disseminate learning and knowledge of law and legal processes and their role in national development ... to develop in the students and research scholars a sense of responsibility to serve society in the field of law by developing skills in regard to advocacy, legal service, legislation, law reforms and the like ... and to make law and legal processes efficient instruments of social development'. These are indeed very laudable objectives. It is expected that both the faculty and the students bear them in mind and try to achieve those, for which the Institution has been set up.

* At the Second Annual Convocation of the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata (23 June 2007).

I would like to emphasize on the importance that has been attached to the use of the knowledge of law in national development and in providing efficient instruments of social progress. I hope and trust that these noble objectives will continue to permeate all the activities of the University.

I heartily congratulate the bright young students who have completed their studies here and are being awarded degrees. It is no doubt, a momentous day in their lives. Getting admission to this prestigious Institution and successfully completing its intensive courses are certainly a matter of pride for the students. As they move out of the portals of this campus tomorrow, they will find a new world of challenges and opportunities. With both practical and theoretical training that they have received, they should be well-equipped to make use of their knowledge and training not only for their own career but also for the benefit of the common people and for the overall progress of our country.

To me, the test of success of a prestigious State-funded institution of learning like this University, providing high level of education, is not only the amount of astronomical salary and perquisites that their students are offered by the multi-national corporations and big corporate houses, but whether and how far are the objectives of the University being fulfilled by the students as effective players in the country's pursuit for progress and in resolving the societal problems in the country.

It is expected that the University and its students should be able to contribute meaningfully and substantially for bringing about the needed improvement in our justice delivery system, which is the crying need of our times and that there should be constant evaluation of the role played by them. I hope the brilliant products of this prestigious University will not fail in being pro-active participants in the discharge of their national duty of serving in ample measure the interests of the common people, who need justice through our legal and judicial set-up and are made aware of their rights.

To my mind, the test of a proper Justice Delivery System in a developing country like ours is to ascertain how far the common people are the recipients of the benefits of the system. Every country, specially a developing one, governed by Rule of Law, has to sustain its legal and judicial processes in a manner that the ordinary people can have easy access to the courts and receive justice. It is obvious that Courts of Law have been set up not for Judges nor for the lawyers but for the people who need to seek justice. And to provide a speedy and effective justice delivery system, there has to be a commitment both by the lawyers and judges. We need good lawyers to come into the profession, otherwise mediocrity and lack of commitment will inhibit our legal process. We need not be only good legal practitioners but also good

judges who are generally selected from the practising lawyers. Therefore, if brilliant and competent students like those who have had the good fortune and opportunity to study in this University, do not actively participate in the Justice Delivery System, as legal practitioners or as Judges, question is bound to be raised as to what role they can play in removing the deficiencies in the system and for national and societal development. I am sure all those who are connected with this reputed Institution of learning will give their serious thoughts to it.

In a recent article, the Hon'ble Mr. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, one of the greatest jurists the country has produced, has observed as follows: "If our Republic is to live up to the promises in the Constitution, the judges have an important role to play. The justice system is the principal instrumentality in satisfying the undertakings in the Constitution. Therefore, 'we, the People of India' must be ensured the integrity and efficiency, the moral responsibility and reality of easy access to the court as well as early finality of dispute resolution."

When India attained freedom in 1947, one of the biggest challenges before the framers of the Constitution was to identify a system of governance that could respond effectively to the vast array of diversities of our country as also the myriad socio-economic problems that the people were faced with in those tumultuous days. Our Founding Fathers finally adopted the system of parliamentary democracy, after purposive and elaborate debate, with the conviction that it best suited our ethos and culture and the specificities of our nation.

In laying the institutional foundations, the vision of the Founding Fathers has been substantially realized through a parliamentary polity, a multi-party system, free and fair elections, independent Judiciary, free and vigilant Fourth Estate and an ever watchful citizenry.

This year we are completing six decades of freedom. Recently, we observed the 150th Anniversary of one of the most heroic and epoch-making events in our struggle for freedom—our First War of Independence of 1857. These are occasions to remind ourselves of the values that guided our Freedom Movement and of the numerous struggles and sacrifices of millions of our people led by visionary men and women, who, motivated only by the good of our country and not for any self-interest, plunged themselves into the long-drawn struggle and in many cases, made supreme sacrifices. We feel proud that many of those men and women were lawyers and the legal fraternity made signal contribution during the freedom struggle. Indeed, many of the leaders of our freedom movement were leading lawyers, who gave up their successful career for the sake of the country.

Our struggle for Independence was not just a movement to achieve freedom from the bondage of the British Rule. It was as much a crusade to free ourselves from the various social evils and socio-economic iniquities and discriminations, to lift the deprived and the downtrodden from the mire of poverty and to give them a stake in the overall transformation of the country. Now, it is for us to introspect and see to what extent we, specially those who have had the fortune of receiving quality education, have been able to realize the dreams of the Martyrs and the leaders of our Freedom Movement and of the Founding Fathers of our Republic. We should constantly ask ourselves what contribution we have made and can make to realize their dreams of a resurgent India and of an egalitarian society, free from class and caste exploitation and free from the scourges of poverty, illiteracy, lack of development, oppression and exploitation.

India at sixty, no doubt, has a mixed bag of achievements to its credit. Though the initial years after our Independence were marked by serious tensions and difficulties, we have emerged stronger from those trials and tribulations. But even after all these years since Independence, it is a tragic commentary on the nature of our development that one billion citizens of the country live in different centuries. We have islands of affluence and alongside, we have poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of healthcare and basic infrastructure. No doubt, we have made significant achievements in some areas, while many other areas still need focussed attention. While we succeeded in maintaining national unity and integrity and in consolidating our democratic institutions in the country, we are still struggling to provide better infrastructure, better living conditions, universal literacy, better health care system, food for all, and employment for all. The problems of communal divide, corruption, gender inequalities and caste-based differences have stayed on, if not grown with us.

Though in our economy, we have been able to make rapid strides with our sustained efforts through planned development and we have been witnessing a substantial growth rates for the past few years and are being acknowledged as a significant player in the world economy, yet on the social front, we have not been able to eradicate the various ills that still plague us. A number of progressive legislations have been enacted to usher in the desired social change: comprehensive land reforms, provision for just and humane conditions of work, for protecting women against violence and against the practice of dowry and for increasing participation of women in politics and for effective democratic decentralization. Laws have also been passed by our Parliament for safeguarding vulnerable sections against social discrimination, for widening the opportunities for education, for enhancing and ensuring rural employment and for removing poverty. But without proper implementation, mere enactment of laws does not guarantee the realization

of the desired objectives and in this sphere, the greatest role can be played, along with others, by our legal fraternity and I feel it is the duty of progressive lawyers in our country to dedicate themselves to achieve our constitutional goals as enshrined in Parts III and IV of our Constitution.

Most unfortunately and rather alarmingly, issues like intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, confrontations and disrespect for dissent are increasingly vitiating our socio-political system. The cynicism that is creeping into the minds of the people, specially the youth, about the functions of our democratic structure is undoubtedly a matter of grave concern. The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. To my mind, we have to create a culture of commitment to democracy and democratic values such as equality, justice, freedom, concern for others' well-being, secularism, respect for human dignity and rights.

But are we to remain as mute spectators to the aberrations in our system? Who is to redeem the system and make it work for the benefit of the nation as a whole? If our youth, to whom tomorrow belongs and as such have the greatest stake in the system, do not come forward to shoulder the responsibilities as citizens in a democracy, who else will act as the catalyst for positive changes in our society?

The educated youth, like the students here, have to be the crusaders for removing the various ills plaguing our society and to provide leadership to change the system for the better. It is of little use to be just critical of others for the aberrations or non-achievements in the society. The country has great expectations from its youth to bring in the freshness of their approach along with youthful energy and passion to address the imperfections in the institutions of democracy. They have to realize their obligations and have to participate more actively at all levels of political and other institutions.

For a country to be governed by Rule of Law, it is obvious that we have to ensure an ideal justice delivery system, so that speedy and effective justice can be made available to all as has been recently emphasized by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, which cannot be achieved, without the committed participation of our legal fraternity, which must necessarily include the Judiciary, increasingly pursuing the same. I believe it is a national duty of all those who are connected with the legal profession as well as those who are called upon to provide justice should consider very seriously whether they are playing any conducive role. The slow movement of the judicial process, the mounting arrears of cases and the lack of easy affordability and accessibility to the legal process have been the bane of our judicial system today and it is imperative to address these issues urgently.

There is a clear perception in our society and as it seems to be that the best legal services are available only to the affluent and due access to the doors of justice is denied to the poor and the socially disadvantaged. The biggest challenge before the Judicial System in the country today is that of ensuring that everybody has affordable access to justice and an assurance that everyone gets equal treatment before the law.

The Learned Judges of the Supreme Court and in the other tiers of Judiciary have often referred with great concern to the huge pendency of cases in different courts of different jurisdictions, pending for 5 or 10 or even 20 years. According to the learned Chief Justice of India about 2.5 crore cases are pending in different Courts.

The delay in our criminal justice system is particularly of gravest concern and there is a growing feeling among the people that dispensation of justice can be affected or frustrated by people of means and of questionable integrity. Some solutions are sought to be found by setting up Fast Track Courts or by adoption of alternate disputes redressal machinery but in my humble experience, to these efforts the resistance has come more from within ourselves than otherwise. Very recently, the Learned Chief Justice of India has been pleased to announce that 7,000 additional courts were being set up with the appointment of new Judges across the country, as has been reported in the media. These courts which will be in the level of Subordinate Courts, hopefully, when set up will considerably reduce the arrears. However, if I am not misunderstood, it seems to me that there is hardly much concern to ascertain why there are so many arrears and why matters remain pending for so long. One usual explanation is that with an increasing population there is bound to be more and more litigations and that there is lack of infrastructure and on many occasions, there is no co-operation between the Bar and the Benches.

Hardly we discuss whether the role of Benches and the Bar helps in the proliferation of cases. The test of popularity of a Judge to the Bar and the litigants seems to be how liberal he or she is in admitting cases and giving interim orders. When I started my career in the 1954, a few years after our Constitution came into force, we had noticed 'competitive liberalism' among a few Judges to entertain petitions and pass ex parte orders. Petitions were filed in dozens and in many cases, as I had seen, interim orders were passed by some learned Judges without even touching the papers. The respondents were not given prior notice and did not even have the facilities of obtaining copies of the petition. The result was filing of many frivolous petitions and torrential flow of interim orders, merited or otherwise. The procedure was changed later on but hardly there was much improvement so far as admissions were concerned.

I had wondered how many of those petitions really deserved even admission and how many of the cases, specially under Article 226 of the Constitution, would ever be disposed of on merits or even be finally decided and in how many cases, the petitions would be or were allowed after hearing. I feel in this respect that Article 226 of the Constitution of India, which is one of the most important provisions of our Constitution for providing relief to the people, has been greatly overused, if not misused. Courts of law should not be utilized for motivated and speculative litigation. I know the people are more conscious and keen to have their rights protected and there are many instances of malfunctioning, if not misdeeds, on the part of the Executive. I sincerely believe and my appeal to all, is to kindly look into this matter to arrive at some workable provision, as otherwise admission of new cases will always outstrip the rate of disposal and arrears will never be done away with. I wonder whether any magic remedy can be suggested to deal with them. I may not be misunderstood for holding the view that mere increase in the number of Judges in the High Courts will only result in more pending cases and inevitably more delay.

In this connection one can usefully refer to a recent book written by Justice S.S. Sodhi, entitled *The Other Side of Justice* containing his rather tumultuous experience as the Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court, about how our system of justice is misused, if not polluted by various devious means, in which there has been quite an active participation by many lawyers and sadly, even by some Judges, as he has mentioned. I think it is useful to go through the book to ascertain some of the failings in our judicial system and how the learned Chief Justice tried to solve them.

I believe that to reduce the arrears and to prevent further accumulation of matters pending decision, we have to think of viable alternatives. We need lawyers trained and committed to take up programmes of law camps, mobile legal aids, Lok Adalats, and other Alternative Dispute Redressal Machinery for providing quick remedial measures to the people. It is primarily the lawyers who can play a very crucial role in bridging the gap between the Judiciary and the people and in ensuring that justice is administered speedily, justly and more efficiently.

Unfortunately, as I have said, resistance to people-oriented reforms comes from within our legal system itself. Often, we have heard of the delay in filling up of vacancies in different High Courts. Subject to correction by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, I understand that at any given point of time not less than one sixth of the sanctioned strength of judges for our High Courts are lying vacant in the country and they are not filled up with the deserving seriousness and speed, as a result of which, it is the common man who suffers.

As I said earlier, we must have good and competent lawyers as well as good and competent Judges. As has been observed by the Hon'ble Mr. Justice Krishna Iyer, the Judges should have professional capacity, character, performance and proper social background. To quote him 'In India where communal lunacy and insidious corruption in action are increasing in public life, the selection of the higher judiciary must rule out all such suspicion. The court must be impeccable in integrity, intelligence, and constitutional wisdom. By accident, we have now fine judges. Currently there is much criticism about the higher judiciary on various grounds; that is why special care must be taken in the choice'.

To quote him further, 'as we look around, corruption, ambition, callousness, craze for position, promotion and five-star craving plus graft, nepotism and other vices are infiltrating into the hallowed place of justice, justices and justicing... The present generation of lawyers and judges, with a considerable number of splendid exceptions, is moving downhill towards professionally amoral, even immoral mores ... many, most members are pure even now. The few are no longer few and are enough in numbers and deeds to debunk the credibility and liquidate the sublimity of the Judiciary. The other joint tort-feasor, the dubious lawyer, who is the corrupter, the traitor, the enemy of the Bar, is surfacing in a swelling stream'.

The people's experience of growing corruption in our justice-delivery system is most unfortunate and an extremely disturbing phenomenon. People's faith in the system can be sustained only if we take effective steps to promote integrity, impartiality and competence in the Judiciary at all levels. Judges should be taken into the higher judiciary only after rigorous and impartial scrutiny. The Supreme Court, as the head of our judicial system, should direct all High Courts to take necessary steps to identify and weed out corrupt elements ruthlessly. Corrupt, incompetent and indifferent people should not find a place in our judicial system.

I am sure everyone will agree that judicial corruption is far more dangerous for the polity than corruption in other organs of the government, which is also condemnable. According to a recent Report by the Transparency International, about 77 per cent of the people who took part in their survey believed that there is widespread corruption in the Judiciary.

A former Chief Justice of our country, (Justice S. P. Bharucha) is reported to have conceded that at best only 20 per cent of judicial officials could be corrupt. I heard the other day, one of our distinguished jurists, Shri Fali Nariman stating that at best only 25 per cent of the judges are corrupt. To me it is not a small figure to be ignored and if one in every four or five judges is corrupt, our judicial system calls for a thorough overhauling.

I consider the unsuccessful effort to impeach one of the judges of the Supreme Court, who had been found guilty by his peers after due enquiry and after following all the provisions of law and Constitution, because the requisite majority in the Lok Sabha had not supported the Motion for Impeachment (although not a single Member of Lok Sabha had supported the judge's actions) has had a most unfortunate effect on the efforts to deal with corruption in the Judiciary.

Today we need to ensure that all the institutions in our democracy function in a manner evoking the respect and admiration of the people and in accordance with the well-laid out scheme of the Constitution. We must recognize as an eminent jurist said 'in a democracy the rule of Law is not to be equated with the rule of lawyers and the supremacy of the Constitution is not to be mistaken for the supremacy of the judges.'

The views expressed by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, are worth recalling 'We want good Judges and good lawyers if a fine justice system is to be the solace of the multitude of actual and potential litigants... The lawyer of yesterday is elevated to be the judge of today and spirals up by seniority or otherwise to the summit. If lawyers are polluted and judges contaminated, the institution collapses'.

The rising expectations of the people, if not adequately fulfilled, can undermine our democratic system itself. All these call for a paradigm shift on the part of our judicial system to work for speedy delivery of quality justice.

While agreeing that part of the problem faced by our judicial machinery is systemic, we also have to be frank enough to admit that some notions have crept into the system at different levels out of a certain perceived role of the Judiciary in a parliamentary democratic set-up, which have substantially enhanced the workload. In my humble view, it is essential for all organs of the State and institutions, including the Judiciary, to have a clear and unambiguous role-perception; otherwise there is a serious risk of entering into arenas, which are otherwise clearly assigned to the other branches of the government. Hon'ble Justice Srikrishna, as a learned Judge of the Supreme Court, has noted in a lecture to the students of a Law College that, 'In the name of judicial activism, modern day Judges in India have abandoned the traditional role of a neutral referee and have increasingly resorted to tipping the scales of justice in the name of distributive justice. The legitimacy of such actions needs critical appraisement at the hands of the legal fraternity.' He further, if I may say so, correctly points out that 'Political questions which were meant to be out-of-bounds for the courts have often been thrown into the laps of Judges. Instead of throwing them back, the courts have, with great enthusiasm, essayed into adjudication of such questions, often with unsatisfactory results.'

Of late, such judicial interventions are not limited to matters of executive action, but even issues of policy and matters which are otherwise in the exclusive jurisdiction of the other organs of the State are now included in its purview. We must recognize as Hon'ble Justice Srikrishna, stressed, 'the answers to many socio-economic and political problems lie with Parliament and in a polling booth and not in a courtroom,' and that misplaced activism 'strains the institutional resources of the court. It also diverts the time, talent and energy of Judges into channels that they are neither required to navigate, nor equipped to, for lack of competence, skill or resources.' One cannot disagree with the views expressed by yet another eminent jurist that: 'The judiciary's task does not include an amorphous supervision of the government.' Judicial activism not only results in the marginalization of the legislative and the executive branches of the government but also in unwittingly increasing the burden on the 'already creaking' judicial branch itself.

Now-a-days, there are umpteen instances where Judiciary has intervened in matters entirely within the domain of the Executive, including policy decisions. As the former learned Chief Justice Verma has pointed out in his Dr. K. L. Dubey Lecture:

> '.....Judiciary has intervened to question a 'mysterious car' racing down the Tughlaq Road in Delhi, allotment of a particular bungalow to a Judge, specific bungalows for the Judge's pool, monkeys capering colonies to stray cattle on the streets, cleaning public conveniences, and levying congestion charges at peak hours at airports with heavy traffic, etc., under the threat of use of contempt power to enforce compliance of its orders. Misuse of the contempt power to force railway authorities to give reservation in a train is an extreme instance.'

Recently, a media correspondent has compiled a list of issues and matters in which the Courts have apparently, if not clearly, strayed into executive domain or in matters of policy. He has noted that the orders passed by one High Court alone in recent times dealt with subjects ranging from age and other criteria for nursery admissions, unauthorized schools, criteria for free seats in schools, supply of drinking water in schools, number of free beds in hospitals on public land, use and misuse of ambulances, requirements for establishing a world class burns ward in the hospital, the kind of air the people breath, begging in public, the use of sub-ways, the nature of buses we board, the legality of constructions in the city, identifying the buildings to be demolished, the size of speed-breakers on roads, auto-rickshaw overcharging, growing frequency of road accidents and enhancing of road fines. And I am sure, there are umpteen such instances in the records of other High Courts

as well. Recently, I read in the papers that one High Court has been pleased to decide how far away the hawkers near a Monument will stand while selling 'golgappas'!

In fact, while dealing with what are known as 'Public Interest Litigation', the Judiciary often gets involved in the constitutionally defined domains of jurisdiction of the other organs of the government and in the process the contours of separation of powers, clearly provided in our Constitution and essential for the smooth functioning of the system get blurred, and the constitutional balance comes under strain.

Our Constitution contemplates 'judicial review' by the Judiciary and not 'judicial activism' which is of recent coinage and extends, as one finds, much beyond review. According to the former learned Chief Justice of India, Justice J.S. Verma 'Judicial Activism is appropriate when it is in the domain of legitimate 'Judicial review'. It should be neither judicial ad-hocism nor 'judicial tyranny.' Justice Srikrishna's warning of the inherent dangers of intrusions into the domains of the other branches of the government merits serious attention, 'The legislative and the executive wings of the body politic, which possess the core competence and specialization in dealing with complex socio-economic problems, are getting progressively marginalized. The judicial organ of the State, the least equipped to deal with socio-politico-economic issues, has occupied the centre-stage, and has got bogged down in more and more of such cases. Sheer expediency or the urge for immediate justice in an abstract sense is hardly a justification for taking on problems with myriad fine details that the court is ill-equipped to handle'. And all this has resulted in further proliferation of cases. And in the process we have also now a new breed of self-appointed 'benefactors' of the society who have specialized in filing PILs primarily to get publicity and for other obvious benefits.

To my mind, therefore, it would augur well for our system and serve the cause of effective and speedy justice delivery process in the country if the principles of separation of powers as enshrined in our Constitution are duly kept in mind. No doubt, our Judiciary has been playing its important constitutional role in preserving, protecting and promoting Fundamental Rights of the citizens, in many cases checking administrative lapses and curbing executive excesses. This is as it should be. But we should all endeavour to function in harmony with each other rather than in conflict.

I have dealt with the subject in some detail in my Dr. K.N. Katju Memorial Lecture on 'Separation of Powers Under the Constitution and Judicial Activism' at New Delhi on 26 April, 2007, to which reference may be made, if any one considers it worthwhile.

As we all know, the Constitution of India has promised every citizen justice – political, social and economic – and in order to fulfil this promise to our millions of poor, illiterate citizens spread over thousands of villages in our country, the legal fraternity does hold a great responsibility. Our judicial system must feel accountable to the people. The legal community must also not forget that the administration of justice derives its strength only from the confidence of the people in the system. The loss of that confidence can lead to instability and threaten the very edifice of democracy. If both the Bar and the Bench join together in restoring and consolidating the faith of the people in the system that we have put in place in the last six decades, they will be doing a great service to the strengthening of our legal edifice, and facilitating the Rule of Law and good governance in the country, thus striving to meet the expectations of the society.

We must ask ourselves how many ordinary citizens of the country, who are oppressed and subjected to various forms of discrimination and denial of rights, particularly women who are victims of torture and exploitation, can have access to the courts, specially the highest court of our country, if he or she needs to approach the courts or contest effectively proceedings initiated against them? How many dismissed employees, how many victimized teachers, how many senior citizens, how many disadvantaged people staying in far flung areas of the country, who would need to seek justice can approach the Apex Court of our country? The geographical distance, prohibitive cost of litigation, inordinately long time taken for disposal of matters, discourage or otherwise make it impossible for ordinary litigants to approach the Court. The situation should disturb the nation's conscience.

As the eminent jurist late M.C. Chagla stated: 'If sections of the society are deprived of the benefits of law and are treated as second class citizens, or if the law does not protect the liberty of the individual, then it would be meaningless to say that the rule of law prevails.'

I must confess that I am a strong votary of setting up Circuit Benches of our Apex Court at least in the three other metropolitan cities and of suitable number of Benches of the State High Courts at appropriate places in the States concerned. But some sections systematically resist such proposals. The reason cited for opposing such pro-people reforms is that such Benches would affect the integrity and unitary character of the Court and would lead to unsettled jurisdiction. To my mind, these reasons are unconvincing and seen from the angle of the magnitude of the problems and of arrears, the advantages to the people would far outweigh the perceived difficulties.

My young friends, those who have been privileged to receive higher education in one of the very prestigious institutions of this country, must always keep in mind the urges and aspirations, and the demands and dreams

of our common people. We require young lawyers with strong democratic commitment and determination to come together and strive for the development of the country.

Before I conclude, I once again congratulate all those who have successfully completed their courses of study and have received their degrees at this Convocation. You all know that learning is a lifelong process, which does not end with the acquisition of any degree. Law is a noble profession and is also a jealous task mistress. To be successful one must work hard and with dedication. There is no short-cut to success in the legal profession, as my Father late N.C. Chatterjee warned me when I started my career as a lawyer.

As you step out of the sheltered portals of your institution, I am sure that you will strive to realize not only your own dreams and aspirations in the years to come, but will also help many others to realize their dreams as well. I hope, you will make productive use of the quality education you have received here for the furtherance of our democratic ideals, for the larger national causes, and to help realize the unfinished agenda before the nation.

Once again, I wish to convey my sincere gratitude to the respected Vice-Chancellor of the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences for giving me this opportunity of being with you. I am sure, the University will continue to produce highly qualified, fully committed, responsible, disciplined, and socially sensitive students of law who will be invaluable assets of our country. I wish you all the best.

Thank you.

ROLE OF LEGISLATURE AND JUDICIARY IN PROTECTING AND ENHANCING THE PEOPLE'S RIGHTS IN OUR DEMOCRACY*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver the Lecture in the memory of Late N.L. Belekar, a lawyer of great eminence and a reputed social worker. Throughout his long and brilliant career as a distinguished lawyer and his very active association with the socio-political life of this great city, late Shri Belekar, made significant contributions for the progress and empowerment of the people of this area. He rendered great service to the people by his participation in several seriously contested cases of public importance, which endeared himself to the people of this city and to the legal fraternity in particular. His immense contributions for the welfare of the masses will always be remembered.

Through the Weaver's Welfare Board that he set up, he created an effective forum to articulate and voice the concerns of the weavers, whose welfare was among his major concerns throughout his life. He effectively used the positions he occupied in the various professional and social organizations for the larger good of the people of this area, who fondly remember him with gratitude. I take this opportunity to pay my respectful homage to his everlasting memory.

I compliment the High Court Bar Association of Nagpur for organizing a Lecture Series in the memory of Late Shri Belekar, thereby providing a platform to deliberate on issues of public importance. This is a fitting tribute to one of the most eminent lawyers of the prestigious Nagpur Bar. It is in this context, and as suggested by the Bar Association, that today I have chosen to speak on 'The Role of Legislature and Judiciary in Protecting and Enhancing the People's Rights in our Democracy'.

Parliamentary democracy was identified by our Founding Fathers to be the most suitable system of governance that would safeguard and protect the democratic rights of our people, who achieved freedom after centuries-long subjugation under a repressive colonial regime. They perceived that

* At the N.L. Belekar Memorial Lecture on the *Role of Legislature and Judiciary in Protecting and Enhancing the People's Rights in our Democracy*, Nagpur (18 February 2008).

only a democratic set up based on parliamentary system would be able to solve effectively the myriad socio-economic problems that the nation faced at the time of independence and would be able to deal with our vast array of diversity on all fronts of our national existence.

Protection and promotion of the democratic rights of the people have been one of the prime objectives of our freedom struggle and our Founding Fathers took infinite care in providing for them under the system of government that they provided in our organic law, namely, our Constitution. They ensured that certain rights, which should be inalienable to all citizens, are protected against State infringement by their incorporation into the list of Rights recognized as Fundamental by our Constitution, subject to certain defined reasonable restrictions and insulated them against unauthorized infringement from any quarter. They also provided that in the protection of the rights germane to a democracy and other elaborate and constitutionally guaranteed rights of the people, all the three organs of the state, namely the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Executive would have their distinct roles to play.

As is well-known, the doctrine of separation of powers, is an inseparable part of the evolution of democracy itself. The doctrine, which provides for checks and balances amongst the organs of the State, is one of the most characteristic features of our constitutional scheme. As has been observed by the Hon'ble Chief Justice Balakrishnan, 'the Constitution lays down the structure and defines the limits and demarcates the role and function of every organ of the State including the judiciary and establishes norms for their inter-relationships, checks and balances.'

Our great leaders who framed our Constitution were able to foresee that excessive power, if vested with any of the three organs of State, could possibly lead to unwarranted situations of conflict, which could compromise the quality and content of our democracy itself. Accordingly, they visualized that all organs of the State would need to co-exist harmoniously in a joint and participatory role and with mutual respect amongst them, so that they could work in a smooth and coordinated manner in the areas demarcated for them, for the larger national weal. In our constitutional scheme, there is no exclusive primacy of any one organ nor will it have absolute power, which is anathema to democracy, as the former Chief Justice of India J.S. Verma has observed. As our Constitution ordains, it is the Parliament that enacts laws; the Executive implements them; and the Judiciary is the independent authority interpreting them. Thus, Parliament has been entrusted with the task of formulating the legislative policies and making laws to give effect to the same and it is for the Executive to enforce them.

Our Constitution-makers ensured that the rights of the people were preserved and protected effectively against any legislative or executive excesses. With this objective in mind, the Judiciary has been conferred power to decide about the validity of the laws passed by the Parliament, apart from deciding disputes between the citizens according to the laws of the land. Our Constitutional set-up has enabled the Judiciary to set-aside not only laws passed by the Parliament but also all executive actions which are not in consonance with the rights of the citizens under our Constitution and its several provisions. The scope of judicial review is confined to see whether the impugned legislation falls within the competence of the Legislature or is consistent with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution and its other mandatory provisions. Our Constitution contemplates that the Courts will only interpret and scrutinize the constitutionality or validity of laws and executive action and not to decide what the law should be.

It was explicitly stated in the Constituent Assembly by many leading figures that the doctrine of judicial independence was not to enable the Judiciary to function as a kind of a 'super Legislature' or a 'super Executive'. I am reminded of the wise and profound observations of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly:

> "No Supreme Court and no Judiciary can stand in judgment over the sovereign will of Parliament representing the will of the entire community. If we go wrong here and there, it can point it out, but in the ultimate analysis, where the future of the community is concerned, no Judiciary can come in the way... ultimately the fact remains that the Legislature must be supreme and must not be interfered with by the court of law in measures of social reforms."

In the early years of the Republic, the Supreme Court had already recognized that the Indian Legislature had a distinctly superior position *vis-a-vis* the other organs of the State. The observations of the then Justice S.R. Das, who later adorned the office of the Chief Justice of India with great lustre, in the famous case of *A.K. Gopalan Vs. State of Madras* (1950 SCR 88) made it very clear:

> "Although our Constitution has imposed some limitations... [it] has left our Parliament and the State Legislature supreme in their respective legislative fields. In the main, subject to limitations... our Constitution has preferred the supremacy of the Legislature to that of the Judiciary... and the Court has no authority to question the wisdom or policy of the law duly made by the appropriate Legislature... and this is a basic fact which the Court must not overlook."

Similarly, commenting on the nature of separation of powers delineated by our Constitution, one of our most eminent Judges, the Hon'ble Chief Justice B.K. Mukherjea, in the Supreme Court, in *Ram Jawaya Kapur Vs. State of Punjab* (AIR 1955 SC 549), observed that "Our Constitution does not contemplate assumption, by one organ or part of the State, of functions that essentially belong to another."

The obvious consideration before the Constituent Assembly was to preserve and protect the freedom and democratic rights of the people and the supremacy of the popular will in our governance structure. As the supreme representative and law-making body, the Legislature has been accorded a pre-eminent position in our political set-up. The power to make laws, its control over the nation's purse, the Executive being made accountable to the popular House, its role in the election and impeachment of the Head of State as well as in the removal of incumbents of high constitutional offices, its constituent powers, and its powers during an emergency, testify to such pre-eminence. Yet, the Legislature must function within the confines as laid down by the Constitution.

To quote Chief Justice Verma, 'The sovereign will of the people finds expression through their chosen representatives in the Parliament ... The real political executive is the Council of Ministers, which also controls the Lok Sabha, wherein lies the real legislative power. Parliament exercises political and financial control over the Executive, and there are inherent checks and balances to keep every organ within the limits of constitutional power. The grey areas are meant to be covered by healthy conventions developed on the basis of mutual respect keeping in view the common purpose to be served by the exercise of that power.'

To my mind, the preference for legislative pre-eminence in parliamentary democracy is as an offshoot of the basic postulate of constitutional supremacy. By its very representative character, in a democracy, no organ other than the Legislature is better placed to understand the people's priorities. It is expected of the people's representative bodies to voice people's problems, their demands, their urges and aspirations, and, in the ultimate analysis, to protect and promote their fundamental democratic rights. The inalienable constitutional right of the Legislature to scrutinize and oversee the functioning of the Executive arise from this basic premise and it has been specifically provided that the Council of Ministers in the Centre shall be responsible to the House of People, which is the directly elected body. There are similar provisions in the Constitution which provide that the State Governments are responsible to the Legislative Assemblies in the State. The responsibility for identifying and defining people's rights and for providing statutory sanction for them and for giving the general direction and momentum to the

institutions for social engineering in our democracy has thus been thoughtfully bestowed by our Founding Fathers on our Parliament and our State Legislatures, which represent the people of India as a whole, or the States, respectively.

All institutions of governance in a democracy are expected and are indeed required to remain accountable to the people directly or indirectly. It is this notion of abiding accountability to the people which holds the key to the success and sustenance of democracy. Thus, the Legislature has been given the inalienable right to scrutinize and oversee the functioning of the Executive and can require the executive authorities to act according to the laws framed by it and the policies and programmes that have its sanction. Elaborate procedure has been laid down for the Legislature to discharge such function of enforcing the accountability of the Executive to the Legislature and thereby to the elected representatives of the people and ultimately to the people themselves.

Protection and enhancement of people's rights in a democracy are fundamentally about their empowerment within and *vis-a-vis* the system. It is in creating conditions for the empowerment within the system for enabling the people to enjoy their basic democratic rights that the Legislative Wing is expected to play the most crucial role in a democracy and, conversely, it is in the safeguard and the enjoyment of those rights that the Judicial Wing has to play the vital role.

Several laws have been passed by our Parliament, over the years for protecting and enhancing the people's rights and for prohibiting practices that are inimical to the societal development, and for the establishment of an egalitarian society. For such purposes, amendments to some of the provisions of the Constitution and the existing legislations have also been made to keep pace with the requirement of the times. Our Parliament's initiatives, all these years, in enacting laws to bring about social change, to help provide just and humane conditions of work, to ensure maternity relief, to provide protection to women at the work place, to broaden the base of women's participation in politics, to safeguard the vulnerable sections against social discrimination, violence and atrocities, against child marriages, to abolish the practice of dowry, for land reforms, for reducing the voting age from 21 to 18, for strengthening our Panchayati Raj Institutions, to provide a conducive environment for the development of children, to put an end to the sexual exploitation of women and their indecent representation, to protect women from domestic violence, to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of our society, including women, children and the minorities, to ensure rural employment and thereby to address rural poverty, among others, have been part of that larger scheme to empower the people within our democratic framework.

Human dignity and fundamental rights of the citizens have always been at the centre of our legislative concern, and Parliament, in effect, has worked as a catalyst of social engineering all these years. The National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Women, the National Commissions for Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, the National Commissions for Minorities and the Backward Classes are all creations of our Parliament from this broad perspective.

But, there is the need to address the moot question, whether the Constitution and the various measures taken by the Parliament and the other organs of the State have been able to make a positive difference in the life of the ordinary man and woman, the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes, the backward classes, women, children and the minorities ? Unfortunately, the enthusiasm demonstrated in making these laws has not always been matched by a commitment to fully implement them. Many of the progressive legislations, with far-reaching goals are, perhaps, not known to the potential beneficiaries. Vast majority of our citizens and specially rural men and women are apparently not aware of their constitutionally guaranteed Rights even today. The reason for most social legislations like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), Right to Information Act (RTI) and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act not producing the desired result is the lack of awareness about their existence and provisions among the targeted groups, in respect of which the Media can play an extremely useful and important role. The Executive branch, no doubt, has to share the major part of the responsibility for this gap between the objectives set and their poor delivery and in this sphere, an alert civil society and the media can play a vital role.

After six decades of Independence, however, it is a tragic commentary on the nature of our development that our people, more than a billion strong today, live in different centuries — with islands of affluence co-existing with the scourge of poverty, backwardness, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of healthcare and basic infrastructure. Though we must applaud our substantial achievements in various fields, we should do well to recognize that the developmental deficit is a potential threat to our democratic structure.

There are also several areas where we have not yet been able to achieve as per the expectations of all sections of our people. A lot more needs to be done to address issues like women's empowerment, greater employment opportunities, preservation and expansion of the rights of the farmers and workers, comprehensive land reforms, universal education, etc, among others. When Swaraj was declared, Gandhiji said: "as long as women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country." Certainly, there are constitutional provisions for women's empowerment and

participation in the field of grass-roots level governance in the country. But it is time we went beyond that.

It is my dream to see that the proposed but much debated legislation to provide one third representation to women in our representative bodies be passed during my tenure as the Speaker, Lok Sabha. There is a tremendous groundswell of support for it and I must emphasize, the support is not only from women, but also from all segments of our society. Only when women get substantive say in public affairs, will they get to enjoy their democratic rights meaningfully and their views be taken with due seriousness in all matters.

None of the civil, political, economic and social rights can be exercised by individuals unless they have received a certain minimum education. It is the primary vehicle by which the economically and socially marginalized people can lift themselves out of the mire of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in community affairs. As Noble Laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen, aptly observed:

> "When people are illiterate, their ability to understand and invoke their legal rights can be very limited, and educational neglect can also lead to other kinds of deprivation. Indeed, this tends to be a persistent problem for people at the bottom of the ladder, whose rights are often effectively alienated because of their inability to read and see what they are entitled to demand and how."

More vigorous efforts are required to remove the obstacles that deny children's access to school and at the same time to address the problems that threaten their retention in and completion of schooling. As the National Knowledge Commission has suggested in its First Report, we must have appropriate legislation to implement the Fundamental Right to Education. To my mind, in spite of there being some areas in which the Parliament has not functioned very efficiently and productively, we certainly should acknowledge the significant role of our parliamentary institution in promoting, protecting, establishing and enhancing the rights of the people in our democracy.

It is necessary that all the organs of the State see various legislations in their social contexts, keeping in mind the larger social philosophy of our Constitution and the rights of the people in a democracy. Often, we come across instances wherein the legislative intent is eroded by one or the other organ of State, which is not a very healthy development. If different institutions work at cross-purposes it would defeat the very object of social legislations and lead to confusion and disarray in society.

In protecting and enhancing the people's right in a democracy, the Legislature's role is certainly paramount. It is through effective legislative oversight that the accountability of the Executive branch to the people at large is enforced. If I may say so, the role of other organs comes only after the Legislature has identified and defined the fundamental democratic rights of the people through appropriate legislative or constituent procedures and only the Legislature can propose or define the rights of the people which cannot be arrogated by others.

The framers of our Constitution also took great care to provide for an independent and impartial Judiciary as the interpreter of the Constitution and as the custodian of the rights of the citizens. Our Judiciary has earned the respect and the confidence of the people for the manner in which it has been discharging its duties and functions, particularly, its paramount function of judicial review.

The role that the Judiciary has played over the years in ensuring the Rule of Law in general and in providing socio-economic justice to the people at large has been exemplary. We have had many outstanding Judges and eminent members of the legal fraternity, who have contributed immensely towards strengthening the edifice of Rule of Law in our country. The people no doubt look up to the courts which are temples of justice, with great expectation, hope and confidence for the preservation and enforcement of their legal and constitutional rights.

However, I submit, without any disrespect, that it is not within the jurisdiction of the Judiciary to make laws nor to lay down general norms of behaviour for the government or to decide upon public policy. The scope of judicial review is confined to the enquiry as to whether an impugned legislation or an executive action falls within the competence of the Legislature or of the executive authority or is consistent with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution or with its other mandatory provisions.

There was a lot of appreciation when our Supreme Court was pleased to hold that justice can be provided, through an innovative procedure, to the oppressed citizens, especially those belonging to the vulnerable sections of the community, who have no means, no facilities and, in fact, no possibility on their own to approach the Court even in cases of glaring injustice and discrimination, by giving a liberal meaning to the concept of *locus standi*, without in any way, entering into the areas preserved for the Legislature or the Executive.

However, of late, it is being noticed that the lines demarcating the jurisdiction of the different organs of the State are getting blurred, as a section of the Judiciary, with all respect, seems to be of the view that it has the

authority by way of what is described as 'judicial activism' to exercise powers, which are earmarked by the Constitution for the Legislative or the Executive Branches.

One may point out that the Hon'ble Supreme Court has itself construed that the concept of Separation of Powers is a 'basic feature' of the Constitution. That being so, necessarily, each organ of the State has separate areas of functioning, into which no other organ can enter or intervene, unless permitted by the Constitution itself, and if it so does, it will be contrary to one of the 'basic features' of our Constitution and that includes the Judiciary also.

Our Constitution contemplates "judicial review" and not "judicial activism" which is of recent coinage and extends, as one finds, much beyond review. The Constitution does not contemplate a Super-organ nor confers an over-riding authority on any one organ. No organ has any power to superintend over the exercise of powers and functions of another, unless the Constitution strictly so mandates.

It is obvious that all organs of the State should act only according to the constitutional mandate and should not be astute to find any undisclosed source of power or authority to expand its own jurisdiction, which will give rise to avoidable conflicts and affect the harmonious functioning of the different organs of the State.

But today, there is a considerable feeling even in well-meaning quarters that we have travelled a long way from that objective. On many occasions, the Hon'ble Supreme Court itself has felt it necessary to condemn motivated and frivolous approaches to Court in the garb of Public Interest Litigation (PIL), which goes much beyond the scope of Judicial Review. By way of warning, Chief Justice Verma, in his Dr. K.L. Dubey Lecture, has drawn attention to 'the deliberate misuse of the judicial process by some vested interests to settle political scores, or to shift the responsibility to the Judiciary for deciding some delicate political issue found inconvenient by the political executive for decision.'

No one can take exception to any decision in the exercise of Judicial Review (subject, of course, to the provision of review or appeal, where it lies) invalidating any law or executive action, but where it seeks to lay down some new policy to be adopted or actions to be taken and uses its supposed power to compel executive action on the same without any known authority or procedure, serious questions necessarily arise about the source of such power. Chief Justice Verma has expressed the view that 'Judicial activism should be neither judicial ad-hocism nor judicial tyranny and that while commanding performance by the concerned authority, the judiciary should not take over the function itself, as it will not be a legitimate judicial

intervention, which can only be when it comes within the scope of permissible judicial review.'

The Jagadambika Pal case of 1998, involving the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly and the Jharkhand Assembly case of 2005, to my mind, are two glaring examples of deviations from the clearly provided constitutional scheme of separation of powers. The Interim Order of the Supreme Court in these two cases, to my mind, upset the delicate constitutional balance between the Judiciary and the Legislature. I feel that these were instances of unfortunate intrusion by the Supreme Court into well-demarcated areas of powers of the Legislatures, contrary to the provisions of Articles 122 and 212 of the Constitution. Chief Justice Verma has recently described the orders in the U.P. and Jharkhand cases as judicial aberrations and has expressed his hope that the Supreme Court would soon correct them.

I do agree that there is some cynicism among our people about the way our institutions function, particularly the Parliament and the Executive. Many a time the Judiciary is applauded for its interventions in forcing the arm of the Executive to do certain things or in restraining it from doing certain things. People appreciate it, at least, that is what the media reports. Criticisms of the Executive and Legislatures, from time to time, have been made from the Bench in very strong words while hearing what are described as Public Interest Litigations (PIL).

In my humble view, the contention that the Judiciary should take on itself the onerous responsibility of the governance of the country, in matters, which the Constitution has imposed on either the Executive or Legislature, has serious implications.

Administration of justice derives its strength only from the confidence of the people in the system. The loss of that confidence can lead to instability and threaten the very edifice of democracy. The most important way in which the Judiciary can maintain the people's confidence is by providing speedy and effective justice to them.

People's rights can be effectively protected if they are able to approach the court and have their matters taken up by competent lawyers at affordable costs and have their cases disposed of within a reasonable time. Delay in trial by itself constitutes denial of justice. The right to speedy disposal of cases is an essential right of the people in a democracy. The slow movement of the judicial process, the mounting arrears of cases and the lack of easy affordability and accessibility to the legal process are some of the major concerns our people have *vis-a-vis* the Judiciary today. The Judiciary will become strong only when it identifies itself with the deprived and the disadvantaged and when the latter begin to see the court as an easily accessible institution and

as a bulwark against injustices and oppression. I am told that there are over three crores of pending cases with various Courts in the country, some of them for periods ranging from 5, 10 or 20 years. To many even now the Court continues to be inaccessible and justice remains elusive to large sections because of its delays, high cost and procedural complexities. It is important to ensure that justice is not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or any other disabilities.

There is a clear perception in our society and as it seems to be that the best legal services are available only to the affluent and due access to the doors of justice is denied to the poor and the socially disadvantaged. The biggest challenge before the Judicial System in the country today is that of ensuring that everybody has affordable access to justice and an assurance that everyone gets equal treatment before the law.

The delay in our criminal justice system is particularly of gravest concern and there is a growing feeling among the people that dispensation of justice can be affected or frustrated by people of means and of questionable integrity. Some solutions are sought to be found by setting up Fast Track Courts or by adoption of Alternate disputes redressal machinery but in my humble experience, to these efforts the resistance has come more from within the legal fraternity than otherwise. Very recently, the Learned Chief Justice of India has been pleased to announce that 7,000 additional courts were being set up with the appointment of new Judges across the country, as has been reported in the media. These courts, which will be in the level of Subordinate Courts, hopefully, when set up will considerably reduce the arrears.

If I may submit, the responsibility for managing public affairs should be well left to those on whom the Constitution has imposed such obligation and for which, in the ultimate analysis, they are accountable to the people. This accountability is what differentiates democracy from other systems of governance. Discharge of executive responsibilities by any other authority, howsoever highly placed, but non-accountable, is anathema in a democracy. There should be no assumption that any particular organ has any inherent superiority or a monopoly over concern for the people or that it alone can solve their problems. I believe that activism of any institution has to be, first and foremost, directed to the due discharge of its own basic and fundamental duties.

I humbly submit that for any organ or authority under the Constitution, to enjoy any power, not specifically or by clear implication conferred by the Constitution, the source of power is or can be only the Parliament and no other authority. As has been held, the Supreme Court can declare the law and cannot enact law.

Almost all votaries of judicial activism, including the Hon'ble Judges themselves, while exercising power in such assumed jurisdiction justify it on the supposed failure of the legislature or the executive authorities in taking proper action to mitigate the people's grievances or to find solutions to people's problems.

But with regard to dispensation of justice, how many ordinary citizens of the country, who are oppressed and subjected to various forms of discrimination and denial of rights, particularly women who are victims of torture and exploitation, can have access to the courts, specially the highest court of our country, if he or she needs to approach the courts or contest effectively proceedings initiated against them? How many dismissed employees, how many victimized teachers, how many senior citizens, how many disadvantaged people staying in far flung areas of the country, who would need to seek justice, can approach the Apex Court of our country? The geographical distance, prohibitive cost of litigation, inordinately long time taken for disposal of matters, discourage or otherwise make it impossible for ordinary litigants to approach the Court. The situation should disturb the nation's conscience, and if I may say so, it is for the Judiciary to find ways and means to make the Temples of Justice easily accessible to the common people.

As the eminent jurist late M.C. Chagla stated : "If sections of the society are deprived of the benefits of law and are treated as second class citizens, or if the law does not protect the liberty of the individual, then it would be meaningless to say that the rule of law prevails."

I must confess that I am a strong votary of setting up Circuit Benches of our Apex Court at least in the three other metropolitan cities and of suitable number of Benches of the State High Courts at appropriate places in the States concerned. But some sections systematically resist such proposals. The reason cited for opposing such pro-people reforms is that such Benches would affect the integrity and unitary character of the Court and would lead to unsettled jurisdiction. To my mind, these reasons are unconvincing and seen from the angle of the magnitude of the problems and of arrears, the advantages to the people would far outweigh the perceived difficulties.

Sustenance of a vibrant parliamentary democracy all these years, no doubt, has been one of our most significant achievements of the first six decades of our freedom. Our poor economic conditions, low literacy, the hierarchical social structure, multiple ethnic, religious and linguistic cleavages, were all potent factors that could have inhibited the process of democratic consolidation in India. But proving the skeptics wrong, we have come a long way and today India's experiments with democratic governance have received universal recognition and our hugely multi-cultural society is seen as an

example for those struggling to cope with the complexities of race, religion, language and culture. No doubt, it is our representative institutions that have contributed the most to the consolidation and strengthening of democracy in the country. I believe that the Parliament has discharged its function of safeguarding people's rights and charting out the path of social engineering with the utmost sense of responsibility and in the process, earning admiration and respect of the people.

However, the competitive and confrontational politics that we are experiencing today is considerably weakening the foundation of our democratic system. There is a growing perception among some sections of our people, particularly the youth, that democratic institutions are not functioning as they should. Debates and discussions, the hallmarks of democracy, are being over-shadowed by disruptions, confrontation and other non-democratic alternatives. Corruption is eating at the vitals of our country. The health of the institutions that are supposed to guide the affairs of the nation and take it forward towards a better future is increasingly becoming a matter of concern today for the conscientious sections of the society.

Most unfortunately, there are also allegation of corruption in our justice-delivery system which is a very disturbing phenomenon. Judicial corruption is dangerous for the polity, probably more serious than corruption in other organs of the government. One of our former Chief Justices, (Justice S.P. Bharucha) is reported to have conceded that at best only 20 per cent of judicial officials could be corrupt. It is not a small figure to be ignored and if one in every five judges is corrupt, our judicial system calls for a thorough overhauling. Otherwise, our people will lose all their faith in the system. What is even more appalling is the Chief Justice's expression of helplessness in dealing with the menace due to the perceived absence of disciplinary power with the Supreme Court in dealing with the undesirable elements within our higher judicial set up. It is too serious a matter to be overlooked for the health of our entire socio-political system as a whole. Justice Krishna Iyer aptly summarized the creeping malady of the judicial system when he said:

> "As we look around, corruption, ambition, callousness, craze for position, promotion and five-star craving plus graft, nepotism and other vices are infiltrating into the hallowed place of justice, justices and justicing. This affluenza craze and passion for tax-free perks are creeping into court culture... The few are no longer few and are enough in numbers and deeds to debunk the credibility and liquidate the sublimity of the judiciary."

We need to introspect and see how and why these developments, unacceptable to the people, are taking place and address the cause with all sincerity. We must recognize that democracy is not all about periodic elections and the political rights alone. It is fundamentally about providing for the basic needs of the people. Our failures on several fronts have resulted in depriving substantial sections of our people of the benefit of a healthy and dignified existence. With a stratified social structure, characterized by inequity, gender-based discrimination, lopsided development, regional imbalances, with a sizeable section living below the poverty line experiencing unemployment and under employment, and with substantial sections of our people denied of the benefits of modern science and technology, without access to safe drinking water and dependable energy supply, and good health-care, we have to concede that we have not been able to provide for our people's entitlements taking full advantage of democratic governance in the past six decades.

Most unfortunately and rather alarmingly, issues like intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, confrontations and disrespect for dissent are increasingly vitiating our socio-political system. The cynicism that is creeping into the minds of the people, specially the youth, about the functions of our democratic structure is undoubtedly a matter of grave concern. The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. To my mind, we have to create a culture of commitment to democracy as our Constitution delineates and to democratic values such as equality, justice, freedom, concern for others' well being, secularism, respect for human dignity and rights.

Parliamentary democracy can become meaningful for the people only when all our institutions that constitute our governance structure perform at their best keeping the interest of the people and the country in mind and in conformity with the fundamental law of the land, our Constitution. The Executive has to be seen to be functioning to address the concerns of the people, the Legislature reflecting the urges and aspirations of the people and the larger national causes as opposed to narrow partisan politics and the Judiciary, as an independent arbiter, dispensing speedy and inexpensive justice to every section of the people. We need to take effective steps to facilitate access to the higher Judiciary for the common people.

All our citizens have to get to feel that the Constitutional authorities exist to serve them and that they are ultimately accountable to them. We must recognize that there is a symbiotic relationship between institutions of the State. If we do anything that could weaken one, its adverse consequences will be felt by the entire system. Unlike those representing the other

institutions, the Legislators' accountability to the people is real and they are made to answer for their omissions and commissions every time they seek the mandate of the people. Today what is important is for all stake-holders to work unitedly with dedication, commitment, cooperation and self-discipline to find lasting solutions to the people's problems so that we can safeguard parliamentary democracy from the strains that it is experiencing and further consolidate it in the coming years.

The people identify themselves with the political system only through the institutions of our democracy. Sustaining the credibility of democratic processes and institutions is the collective responsibility of all institutions. None of them should work at cross-purpose or in a manner contributing to the other organs to be perceived by the people as defunct, irrelevant, impotent or suspect. The fact that today the people are increasingly becoming aware of their rights as also the obligations of the institutions of governance towards them, should sensitize those institutions to improve the quality of delivery.

Ultimately, what is important is that all constitutional entities, be it the Legislature, or the Executive or the Judiciary, ever remain sensitive both to the Constitution that created them as also to the hopes and aspirations of the people for safeguarding whose interest and rights they are created. While considering the respective role and relevance of two of the fundamental organs of governance in a democracy, the Legislature and the Judiciary, we have to weigh them against this yardstick. As we all would recognize, in a democracy, the biggest safeguard against, arbitrary exercise of power by people's institutions is the vigilance of the people themselves.

Friends, democracy and people's rights are interdependent and inseparable. The goal of democracy is achieved not only through the institutions and laws but also through the actual practice of democratic principles, norms, standards and values which should be measured by the degree to which they are actually implemented and the extent to which they advance the realization of people's rights. All organs of the State must, therefore, strive to protect the rights and interests of everybody without any discrimination, especially the rights and interests of the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of the society, according to their constitutional obligations failing which the very edifice of democracy may collapse.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again thank the Nagpur High Court Bar Association for according me this opportunity to share with this august gathering some of my views on some very sensitive and topical issues. I wish them all success in their endeavours towards the furtherance of the lofty ideals and values for which Late Shri N.L. Belekar lived.

Thank you.

JUSTICE DELIVERY SYSTEM: NEED TO SECURE PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE*

I am extremely thankful to Mr. Nariman, Mr. Bhasin and all my friends in the Bar Association of India for giving me this opportunity to participate in the Golden Jubilee Celebration of one of the most prestigious associations of our legal fraternity. For the last half a century, the Association has made a significant contribution in strengthening Parliamentary Democracy, Judicial accountability and entire concept of the Rule of Law in our country, which has strengthened our democratic set-up. I recall how committed my late father Mr. N.C. Chatterjee was towards the objectives of the Bar Association of which he was the Treasurer for the first two years and thereafter an active participant in its activities. I pay my homage to the memories of all the illustrious lawyers, who not only laid the foundation of this association and also nurtured it with great sincerity and commitment. I also congratulate Mr. Nariman and all his colleagues for their immense contribution in strengthening the association further due to which it has reached today its pre-eminent position.

Friends, our struggle for Independence was not just a movement to achieve freedom from the bondage of the British Rule. It was as much a crusade to free ourselves from the various social evils and socio-economic iniquities and discriminations, to lift the deprived and the downtrodden from the mire of poverty and to give them a stake in the overall transformation of the country. It was with this larger national objective that a democratic polity, based on parliamentary system was established in the wake of freedom. Our Founding Fathers, visionary and sagacious as they were, perceived that such a system would respond effectively to the problems arising out of our vast array of diversity as also to the myriad socio-economic factors that we were faced with, when we achieved freedom through a massive people's Movement after centuries-long humiliation of being a slave nation.

Today, democratic India presents a contrasting picture of affluence and deprivation. On the one hand is the India of the rich, of those who have had the benefit of modern education and are intellectually and materially empowered and, on the other, is the India of those who live under conditions

* At the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Bar Association of India, New Delhi (9 April 2009).

of poverty, deprivation, squalor, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices. With a stratified social structure, characterized by inequity, gender-based discrimination, lopsided development, regional imbalances, with a sizeable section living below the poverty line experiencing unemployment and under- employment, and with substantial sections of our people denied of the benefits of modern science and technology, without access to safe drinking water, dependable energy supply, and good health-care, we have to concede that we have not been able to take fullest advantage of democratic governance in the past six decades. The polity fractured on religious, caste, regional and linguistic basis and influenced by confrontational politics is greatly weakening our democratic structure and simultaneously stifling the country's progress, and it needs serious attention and sincere national efforts to reverse the process.

For a country of continental size and widespread diversity like India, nation building has indeed been a gigantic task. Through our parliamentary polity reinforced by a multi-party system and provisions for free and fair elections to representative bodies, accountability of the Executive, independence of the Judiciary, existence of a free and vigilant Fourth Estate and an ever watchful citizenry, we have provided effective institutional framework for a successful democracy. According to Professor Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate, 'What India has achieved under democratic framework in the past over five decades is far more impressive and it overwhelms some of the shortcomings and failures.'

As is well-known, the doctrine of separation of powers is an inseparable part of the evolution of democracy itself. The doctrine, which provides for checks and balances amongst the organs of the State, is one of the basic features of our constitutional scheme as construed by the Supreme Court. As has been observed by the Hon'ble Chief Justice Balakrishnan, 'the Constitution lays down the structure and defines the limits and demarcates the role and function of every organ of the State including the judiciary and establishes norms for their inter-relationships, checks and balances.'

Our great leaders who framed our Constitution visualized that all organs of the State would need to co-exist harmoniously in a joint and participatory role and with mutual respect amongst them, so that they could work in a smooth and coordinated manner in the areas demarcated for them, for the larger national weal. In our constitutional scheme, there is no exclusive primacy of any one organ nor will it have absolute power, which is anathema to democracy, as the former Chief Justice of India J.S. Verma has observed. As our Constitution ordains, it is the Parliament that enacts laws; the Executive implements them; and the Judiciary is the independent authority interpreting them. Thus, Parliament has been entrusted with the task of formulating the

legislative policies and making laws to give effect to the same and it is for the Executive to enforce them.

In protecting and enhancing the people's right in a democracy, the Legislature's role is certainly paramount. It is through effective legislative oversight that the accountability of the Executive branch to the people at large is enforced. The Legislature gives shape to exercise of the fundamental democratic rights of the people through appropriate legislative or constituent procedures and only the legislature can propose or define the rights of the people.

The framers of our Constitution also took great care to provide for an independent and impartial Judiciary as the interpreter of the Constitution and as the custodian of the rights of the citizens. Our Judiciary has earned the respect and the confidence of the people for the manner in which it has been discharging its duties and functions, particularly, its paramount function of judicial review. We have had and have many outstanding Judges and eminent members of the legal fraternity, who have contributed immensely towards strengthening the edifice of Rule of Law in our country. The people no doubt look up to the courts which are temples of justice, with great expectation, hope and confidence for the preservation and enforcement of their legal and constitutional rights.

But with regard to dispensation of justice, how many ordinary citizens of the country, who are oppressed and subjected to various forms of discrimination and denial of rights, particularly women who are victims of torture and exploitation, can have access to the courts, specially the highest court of our country, if he or she needs to approach the courts or contest effectively proceedings initiated against them? How many dismissed employees, how many victimized women, how many senior citizens, how many disadvantaged people staying in far flung areas of the country, who would need to seek justice, can approach the Apex Court of our country? The geographical distance, prohibitive cost of litigation, inordinately long time taken for disposal of matters, discourage or otherwise make it impossible for ordinary litigants to approach the Court. The situation should disturb the nation's conscience, and if I may say so, it is for the Judiciary to find ways and means to make the Temples of Justice easily accessible to the common people.

As the eminent jurist late M.C. Chagla stated : "If sections of the society are deprived of the benefits of law and are treated as second class citizens, or if the law does not protect the liberty of the individual, then it would be meaningless to say that the rule of law prevails". The confidence of the people in the justice-delivery system is an essential prerequisite for the very

survival of democracy. The loss of that confidence can lead to instability and threaten the very essence of democracy. People's primary expectation from the judicial system, which include the lawyers, Judges and the administrative system, is the availability of speedy, affordable and effective justice to all. It must be kept in mind that the Courts are established not for judges or lawyers, but primarily for the citizens who seek solution to their problems. Judicial reforms will have no meaning for the common people if they are not able to approach the court and not have their matters taken up by competent lawyers at affordable costs and have their cases disposed of within a reasonable time.

I must confess that I am a votary of setting up the Circuit Benches of our Apex Court at least in the different metropolitan cities and of suitable number of Benches of the State High Courts at appropriate places in the State concerned. Such proposals are resisted by some sections within the Bench and the Bar claiming it would affect the integrity and unitary character of the Court and would lead to unsettled jurisdiction. If the learned judges and the legal fraternity are opposed to the same, then they should take other initiatives which will help in taking our justice-delivery system at different levels closer as also cheaper for the people who are its real patrons and the intended beneficiaries.

Institutions of governance have relevance for the people only when they serve the purpose for which they have been created. It is in the effective discharge of the functions expected of it that it serves the people for whom the institutions are meant.

There is definitely sufficient space in our system for all the institutions to co-exist and work together for the common weal. As I have repeatedly said, the people look up to the courts which are temples of justice, with great expectation, hope and confidence. Similarly, people look up to the Parliament and State Legislatures, of which the Executive is a part, with as much, if not more expectation and hope, because under the Constitution, the Parliament is the supreme legislative institution of the country, the people's institution par excellence, through which executive accountability is enforced. It is the duty of all concerned, including the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary, to ensure that this balance is scrupulously adhered to.

I am happy that the Bar Association of India, during the past five decades of its existence, has been playing an effective role as an important part of the justice delivery system in the country. It has contributed significantly in creating better legal awareness among the people, in fighting for their legitimate rights and in ensuring rule of law in the country.

Once again, I felicitate the Bar Association of India on its golden jubilee celebrations and wish them all success in their future endeavours. I would also like to convey my sincere gratitude to my friend Shri Fali Nariman and the organizers for giving me this opportunity to be amongst this august gathering on this important occasion.

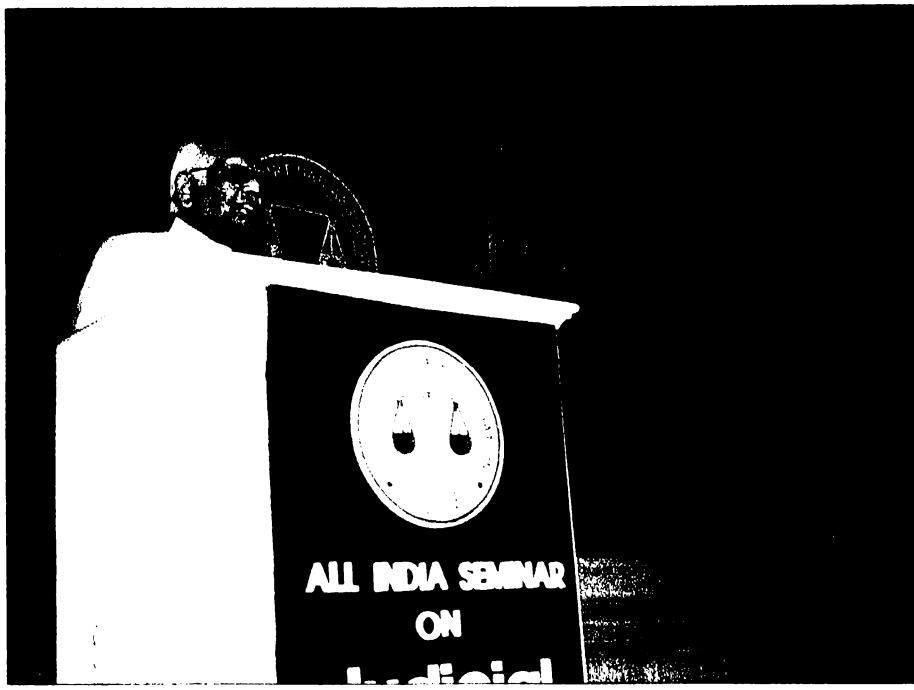
Thank you.

The Indian Parliamentary Delegation led by the Lok Sabha Speaker, Shri Somnath Chatterjee at the 111th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, September-October 2004

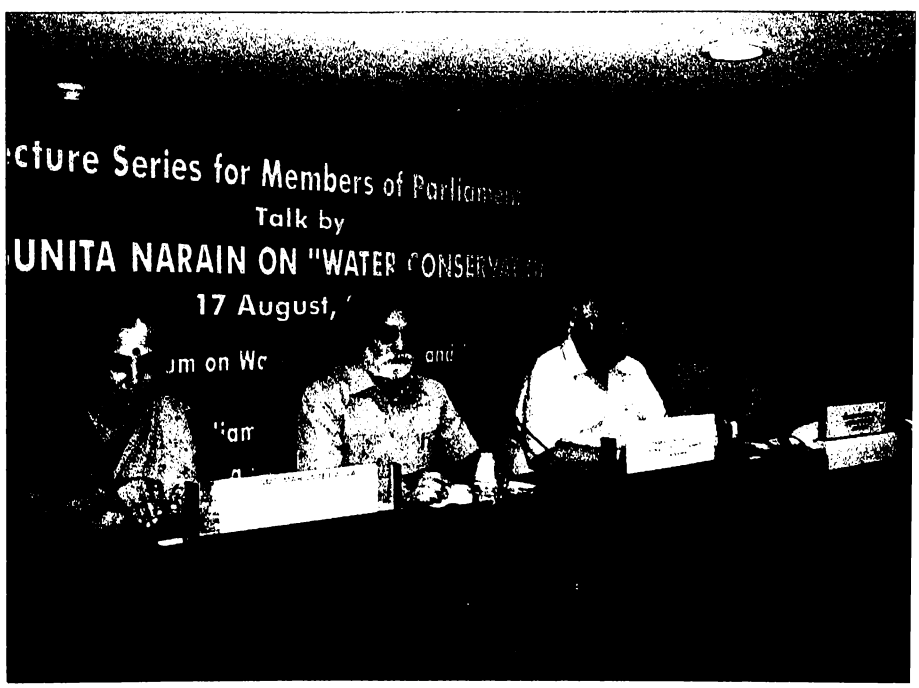
At the function to confer the Outstanding Parliamentarian Awards on Shri L.K. Advani, M.P., Shri Arjun Singh, M.P.; Shri Jaswant Singh, M.P.; and Dr. Manmohan Singh, M.P., for the years 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002, respectively, Central Hall, Parliament House, New Delhi, 21 March 2005

At the Ninth JRD Tata Memorial Oration on *Towards Population Stabilization: Role of Good Governance*, New Delhi, 30 March 2005

Addressing the 112th Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union, Manila, 3 April 2005



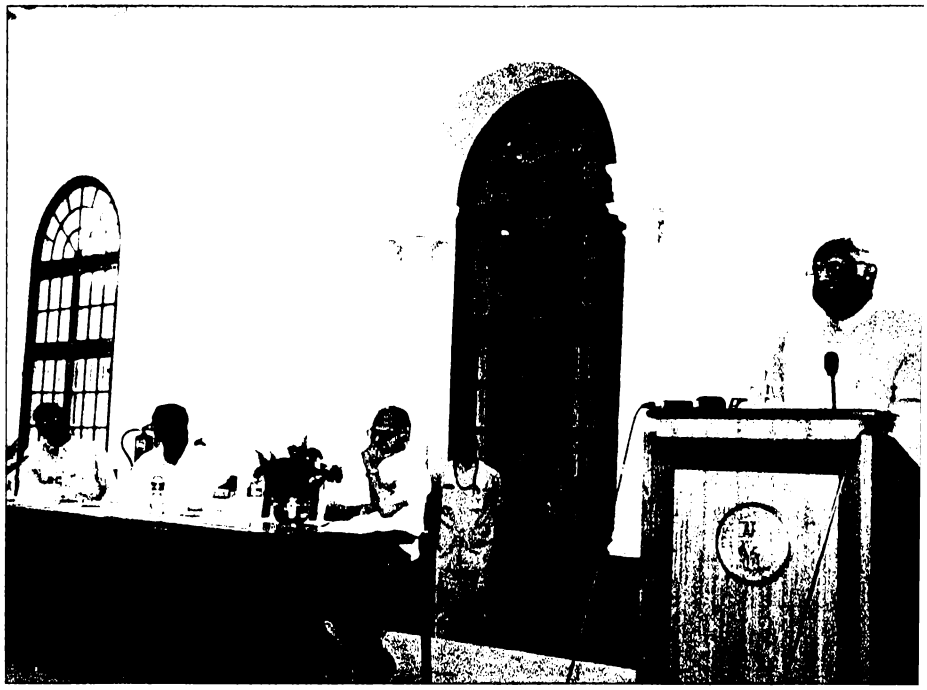
Delivering the Valedictory Address at the All India Seminar on *Judicial Reforms, with Special Reference to Arrears of Court Cases*, Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, 30 April 2005



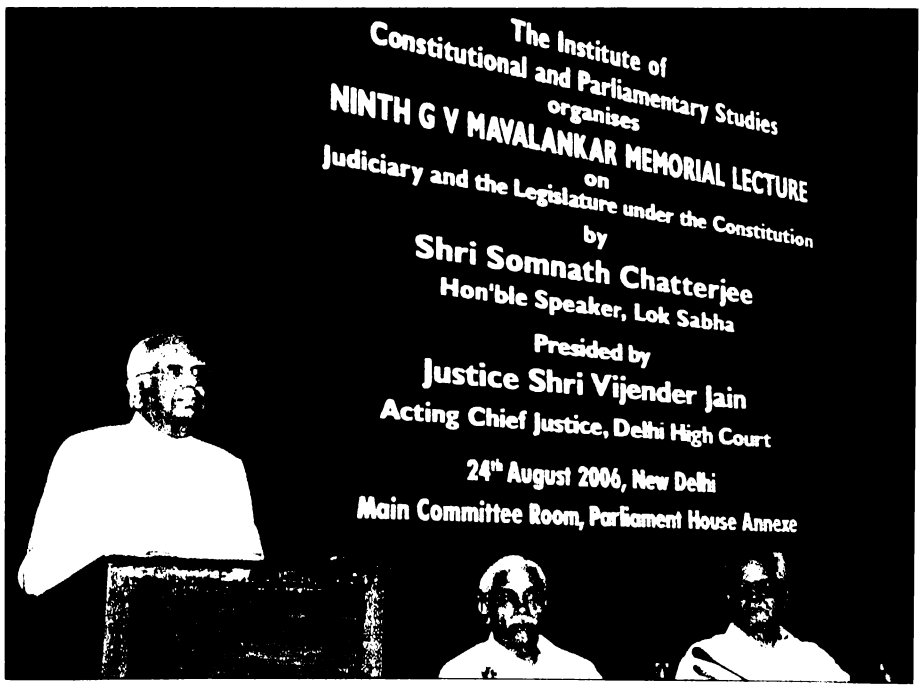
At the inauguration of the Lecture Series for Members of Parliament, BPST, New Delhi, 17 August 2005

Addressing the 70th Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, 15 November 2005

Addressing the 18th Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers' Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, 4 January 2006

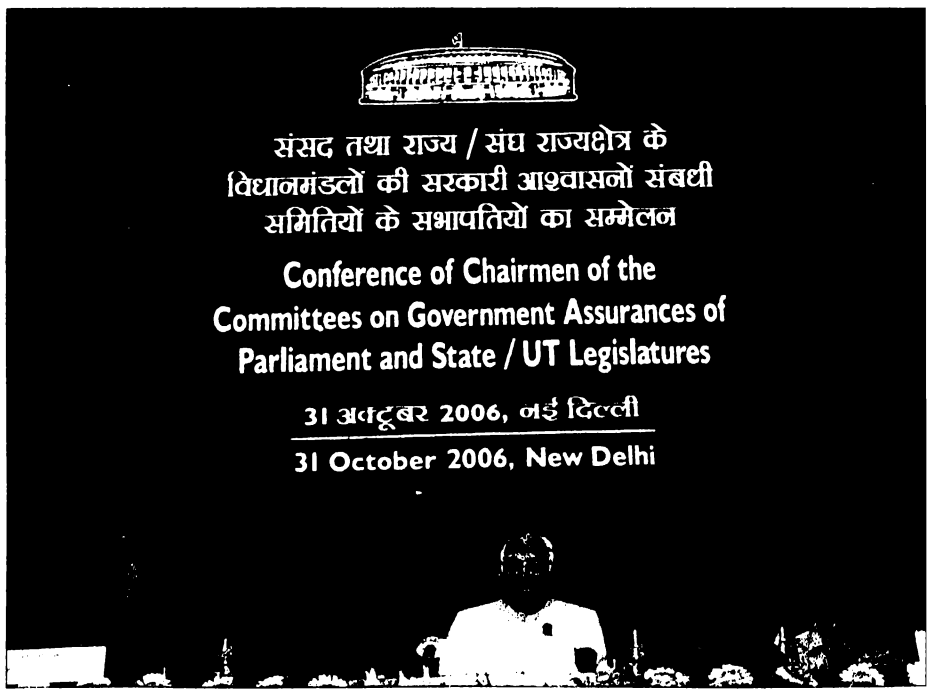


Delivering the Inaugural Lecture on *Challenges before Indian Democracy* in the Delhi University Lecture Series, Delhi, 8 March 2006

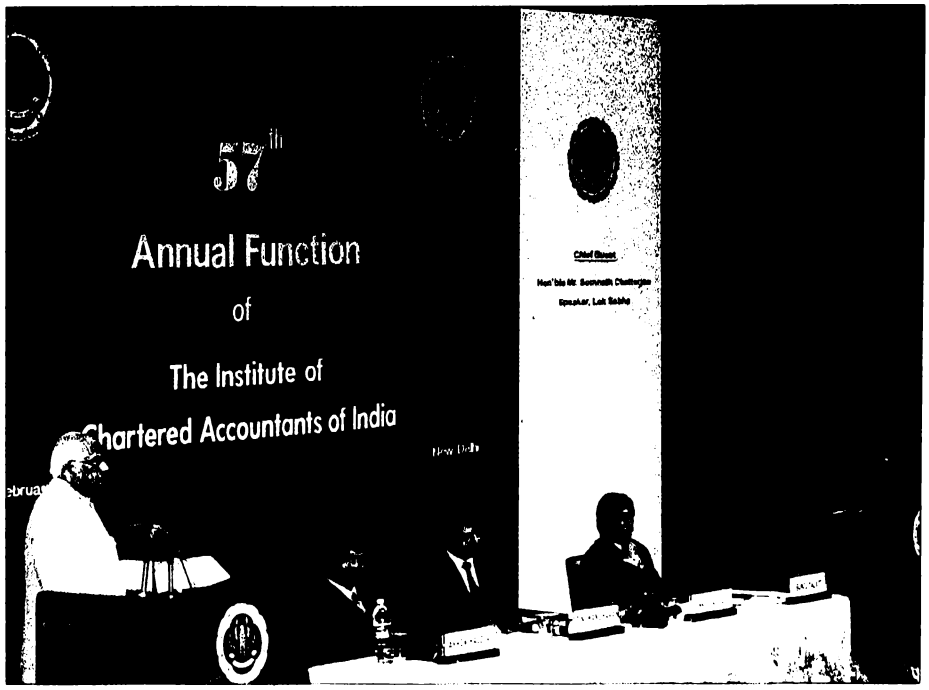


Delivering the Ninth G.V. Mavalankar Memorial Lecture on *Judiciary and the Legislature under the Constitution*, New Delhi, 24 August 2006

Addressing the function to mark the 150th Anniversary of the Revolt of 1857 and the Birth Centenary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Hansi, Haryana, 10 October 2006

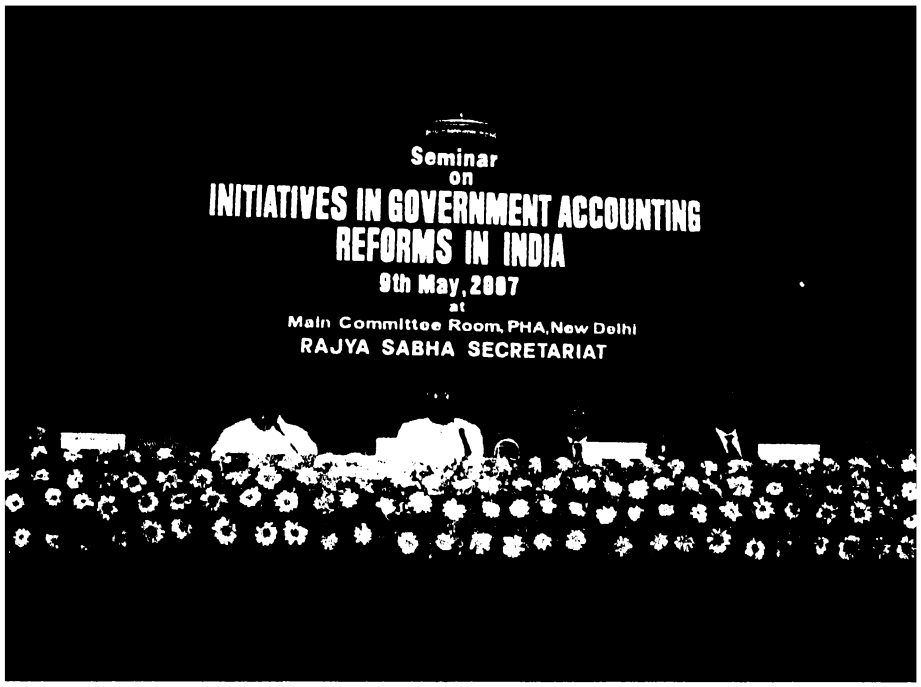

संसद तथा राज्य / संघ राज्यक्षेत्र के
विधानमंडलों की सरकारी आश्वासनों संबधी
समितियों के सभापतियों का सम्मेलन
Conference of Chairmen of the
Committees on Government Assurances of
Parliament and State / UT Legislatures
31 अक्टूबर 2006, नई दिल्ली
31 October 2006, New Delhi

Addressing the Conference of Chairmen of the Committees on Government Assurances of Parliament and State/Union Territory Legislatures, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi, 31 October 2006

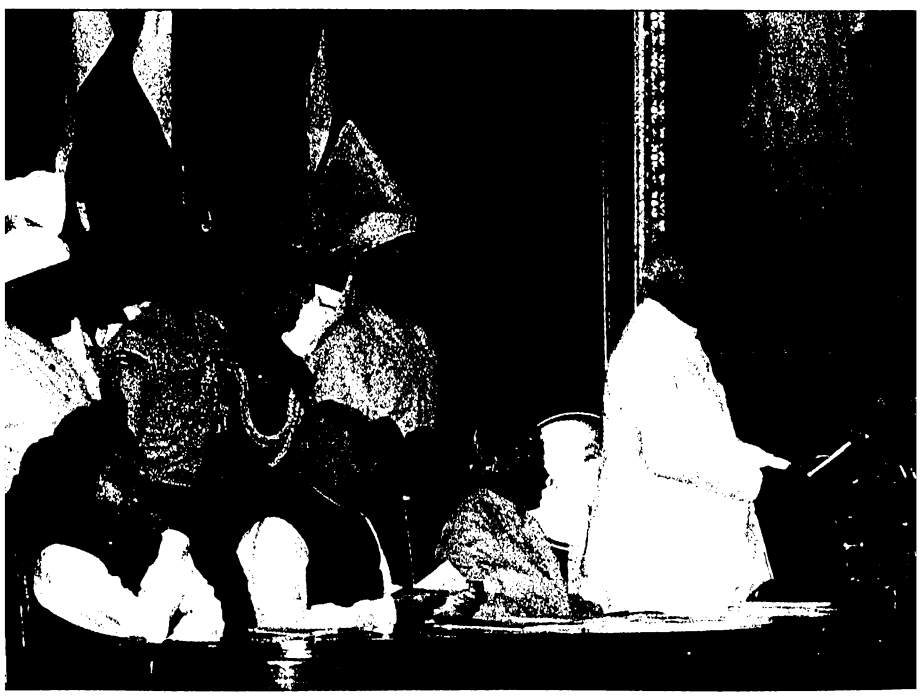


Speaking at the 57th Annual Day Celebrations of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), New Delhi, 4 February 2007

Speaking at a programme organized by the Ministry of Women and Child Development after presenting *Ananya awards* to women achievers, New Delhi, 9 March 2007



Inaugurating the Seminar on *Initiatives in Government Accounting Reforms in India*, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi, 9 May 2007

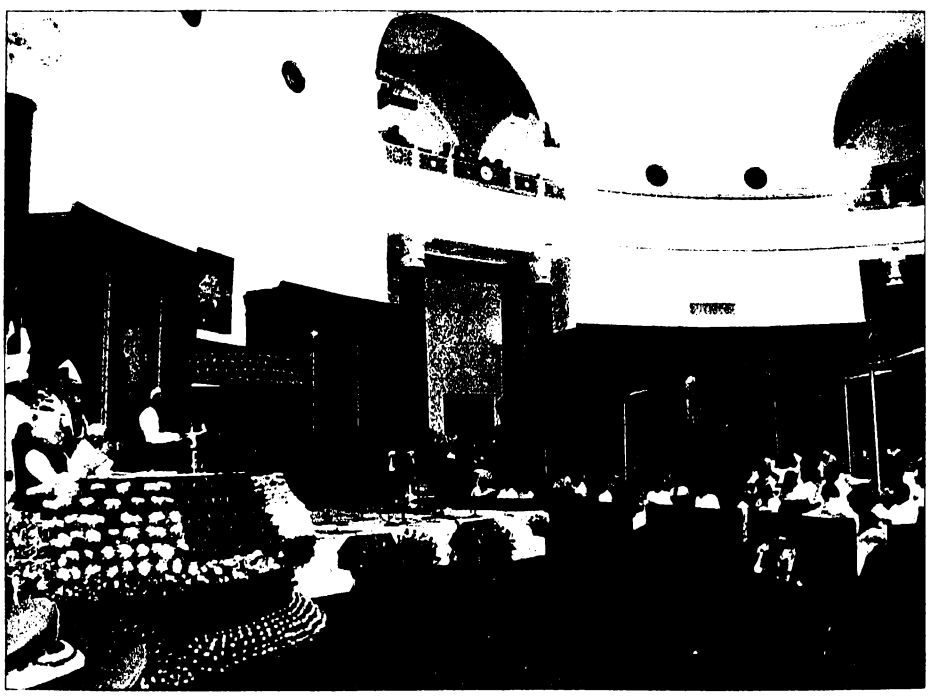


Addressing the distinguished gathering at the function to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the First War of Independence, Central Hall, Parliament House, New Delhi, 10 May 2007

At the function to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the First War of Independence, Red Fort, New Delhi, 11 May 2007

Inaugurating the 72nd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, 25 May 2007

Speaking on *Parliamentary Democracy in India* at the function to mark the Birth Centenary of Late Babu Jagjivan Ram, New Delhi, 30 May 2007

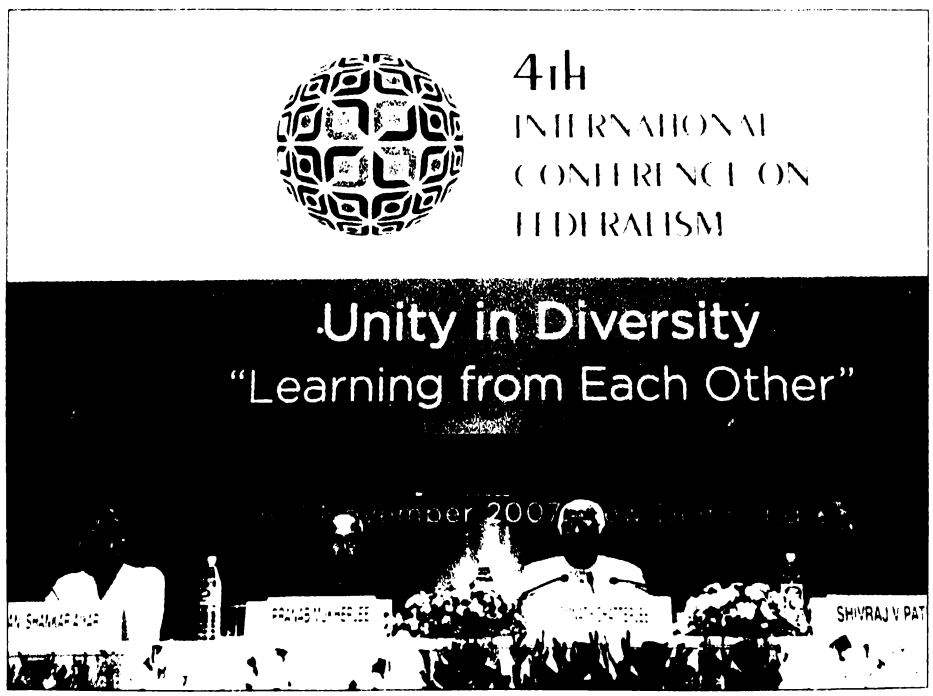


At the function in the Central Hall to mark the 60th year of India's Independence on 15 August 2007

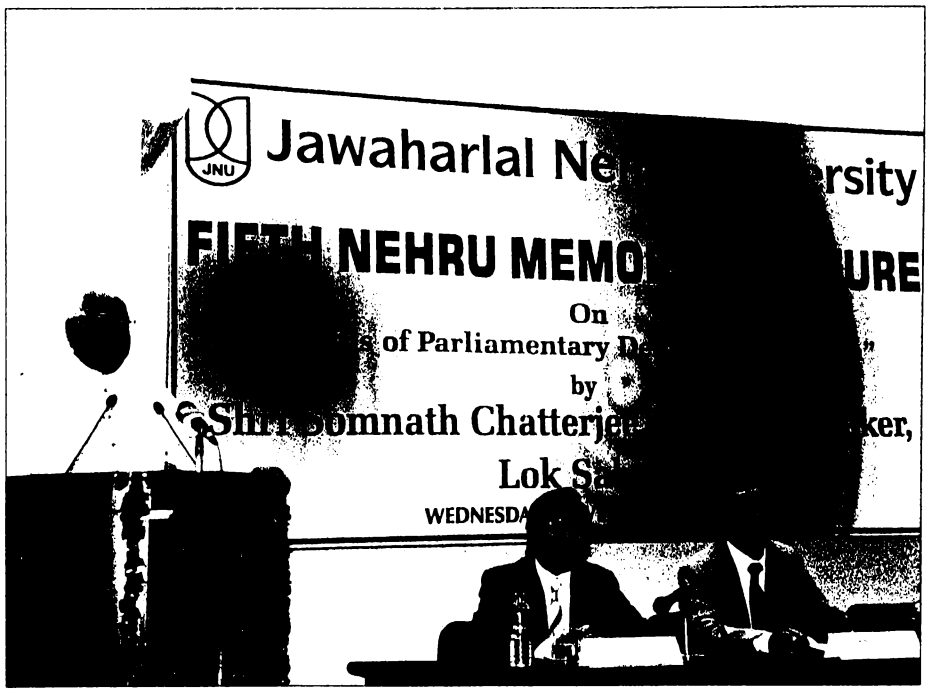
At the Inaugural Ceremony of the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, 25 September 2007

At the Valedictory Function of the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, 28 September 2007

At the inauguration of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Chemicals and Allied Products Export Promotion Council (CAPEXIL), New Delhi, 1 October 2007

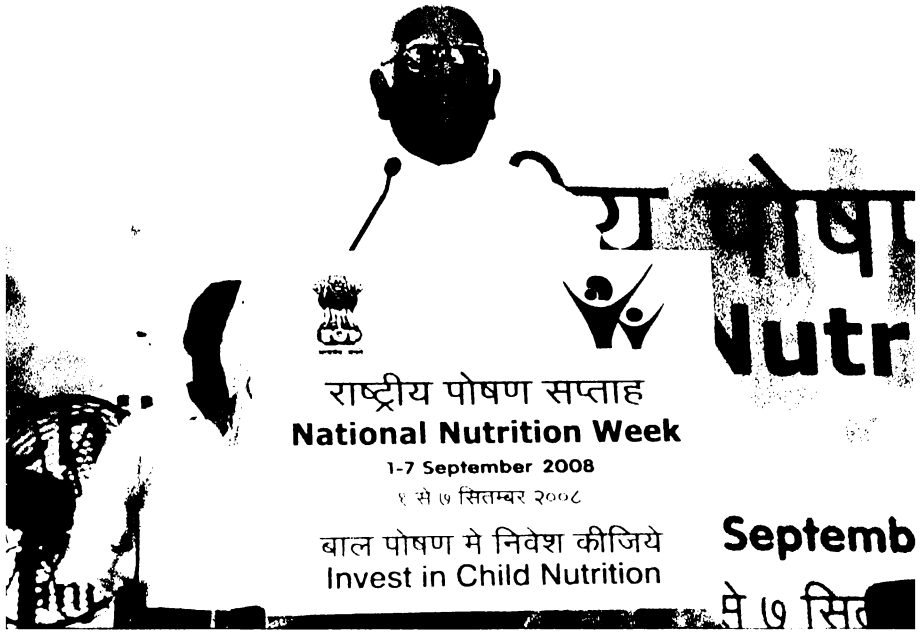


At the Discussion Session of the "Fourth International Conference on Federalism", New Delhi, 5 November 2007

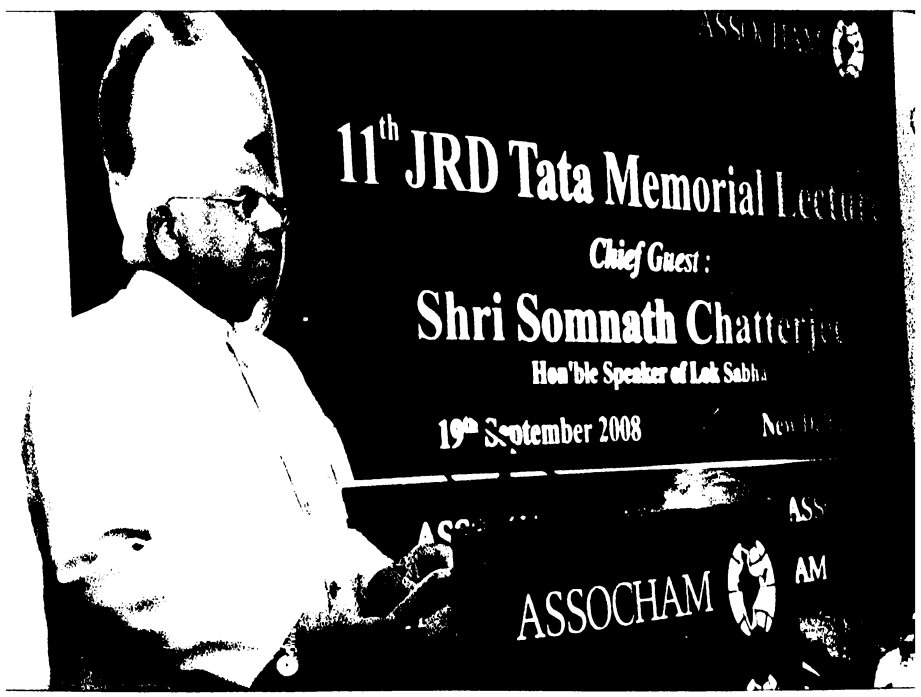


Delivering the Fifth Nehru Memorial Lecture on *Status of Parliamentary Democracy in India*, JNU, New Delhi, 14 November 2007

Delivering the Valedictory Address at the 14th All India Whips Conference, Vidhan Bhawan, Mumbai, 5 February 2008

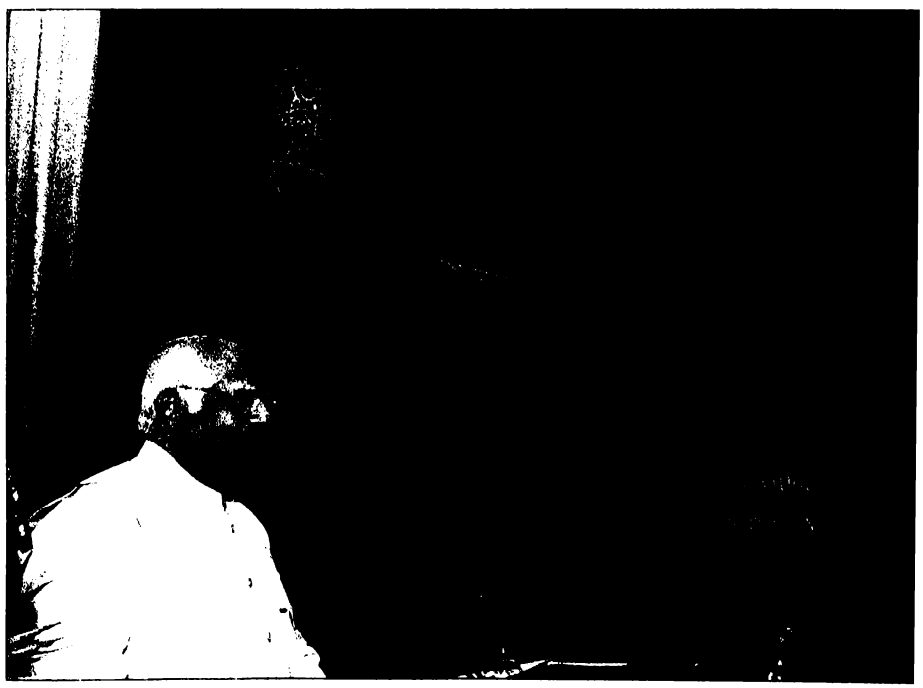


Inaugurating the Nutrition Week Celebrations, New Delhi, 5 September 2008

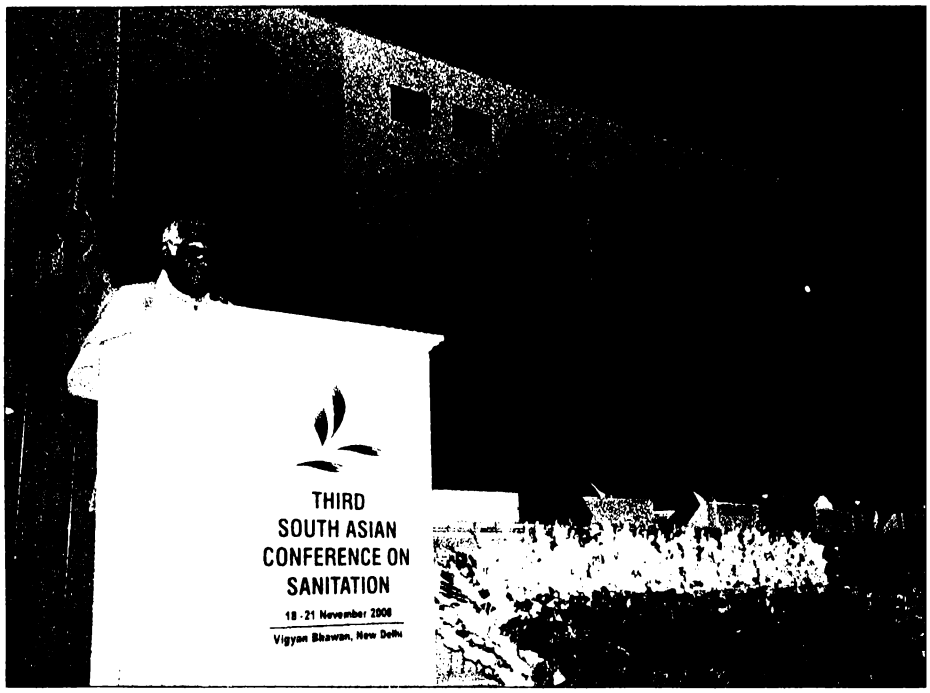


Delivering the JRD Tata Memorial Lecture on 19 September 2008

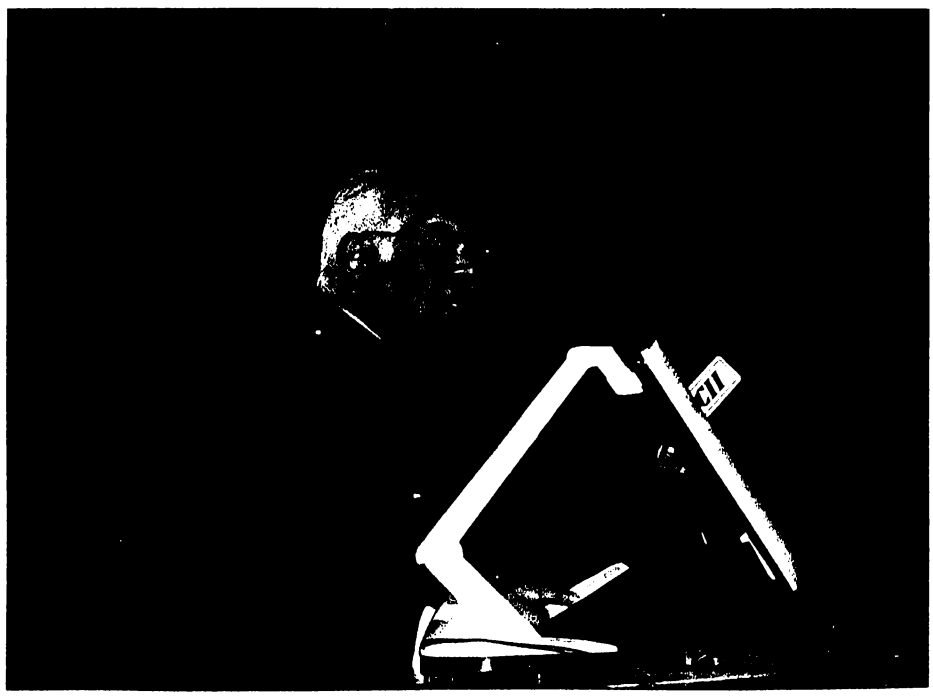
Addressing the 73rd Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India at the Haryana Vidhan Sabha, Chandigarh, 21 September 2008



Delivering the Valedictory Address at the 3rd Annual Convention of Central Information Commission at DRDO Bhawan, New Delhi, 4 November 2008

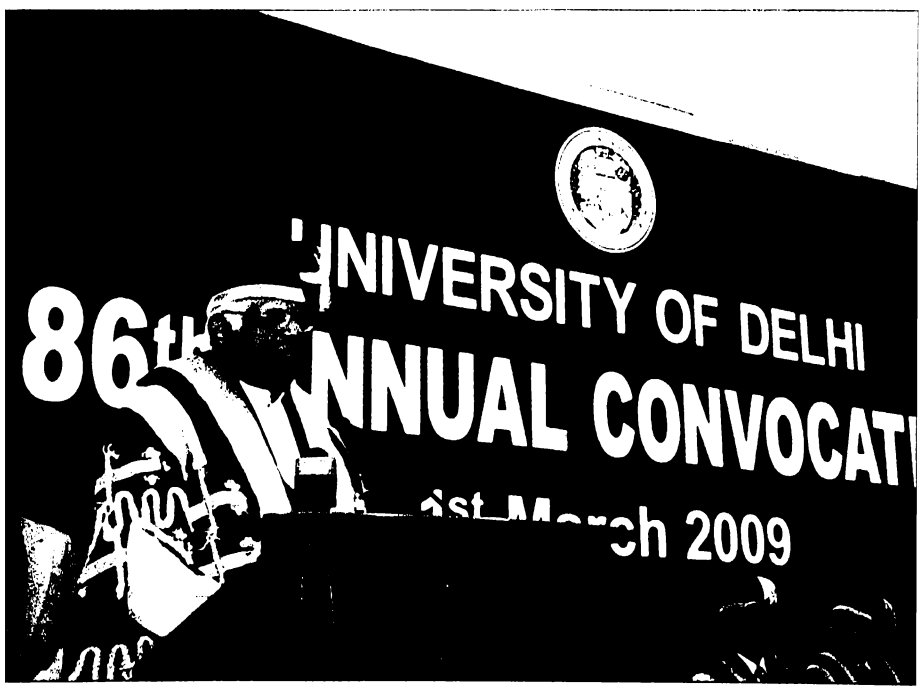


Delivering the Keynote Address at the Closing Ceremony of the
"Third South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN)"
held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, 21 November 2008

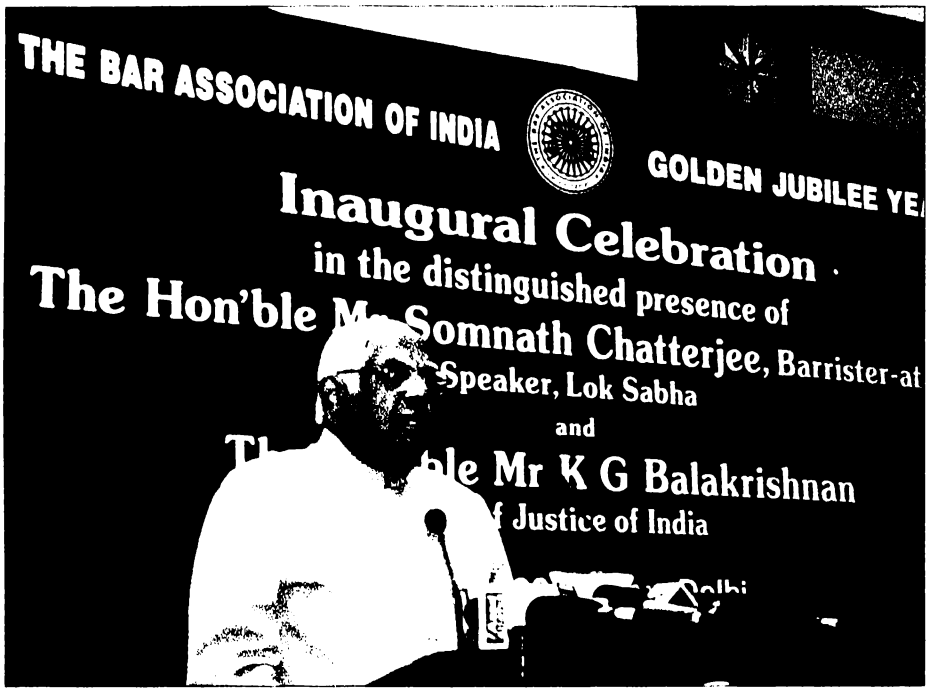


Delivering the Keynote Address at the inauguration of the
"3rd Sustainability Summit: Asia 2008" in New Delhi, 11 December 2008

Delivering the Valedictory Address at the Conference on Wakf, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi, 20 December 2008



Delivering the 86th Convocation Address at the University of Delhi on 1 March 2009



At the Inauguration of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Bar Association of India, New Delhi, 9 April 2009

Delivering the C.K. Daphtary Memorial Lecture, New Delhi, 24 April 2009

III
PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY

I compliment the Iraq Delegation for suggesting this subject for discussion.

India has a long history of having close and friendly relations with Iraq and her people and we have always stood by the friendly people of that country in their periods of trial and tribulations.

We are deeply concerned with the happenings in Iraq. As far back as on 8 April 2003, both the Houses of our Parliament which represent the largest practising parliamentary democracy in the world, unanimously adopted a Resolution on the situation in Iraq which reflected the greatly concerned public opinion in our country against the military action in Iraq in March 2003. In that Resolution, the two Houses of Parliament unanimously deplored the military action of the coalition forces against the Sovereign Iraq. We clearly expressed the view that military action against a country with a view to changing its Government, in the present case that of Iraq, was unacceptable to us. Further, such military action was without the specific sanction of the UN Security Council and was not in conformity with the UN Charter. Our Parliament, therefore, expressed its profound anguish and deep sympathy for the people of Iraq whose innocent people, especially the women and the children, were suffering acutely due to such action.

Our Parliament called for immediate cessation of hostilities and quick withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq. We also called upon the UN to protect the sovereignty of Iraq and ensure that the reconstruction of Iraq was done under the UN auspices.

We have always believed and we believe that it is the people of Iraq who will take control of their future and it is time for the international community to stand by them and to see that they can lead a normal life and become the masters of their own destiny and natural resources. Only yesterday it has been admitted on behalf of one of the countries which is a leading participant of the coalition that the justification for taking military action, namely the supposed existence of weapons of mass destruction, has turned out to be wrong. Another major country in the coalition has expressed that the situation in Iraq is getting worse and it is very difficult to restore total normalcy.

* At the 111th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva (29 September 2004).

It is essential that all forms of hostilities, terrorist attacks and counter attacks against the innocent people should stop immediately. It is essential that all of us should endeavour to see that there is an early return to conditions of security and normalcy. India has always played and will continue to play its part in assisting the people of Iraq in their humanitarian and reconstruction efforts. We must affirm the importance of the Rule of Law, national reconciliation, respect for human rights, including rights of women, fundamental freedoms and democracy, including free and fair elections. For all these purposes, it is essential that the people of Iraq should be able to decide for themselves their future and conditions should be created for them to enable them to exercise their franchise freely and according to their own judgment. Such a situation can only be achieved by immediate cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq and holding free and fair elections under the auspices of UN. A stable and peaceful Iraq is of vital importance for the larger stability of the region and of the world and we believe that the outcome of this debate on this issue should contribute positively to that end.

Thank you.

INDIA AND PAKISTAN: IMPERATIVE OF GREATER PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACTS*

I am indeed happy to be here today at the inauguration of the Seventh Joint Convention of the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy. I heartily compliment the Forum on its decade-long endeavours in fostering better understanding and people-to-people contacts at different levels and in reducing tension between our two countries.

Friends, India and Pakistan are bound together by history. We belong to a single civilizational milieu and our people share a rich cultural heritage. In the modern context too, the complementarities that exist between our two countries in different areas are too large to be ignored. As developing countries, we both have to confront more or less similar socio-economic challenges. Yet, in spite of these historical, cultural, social and economic commonalities, which bind the people in everlasting ties, some authorities and concerns in the two countries are trying to divide the people on the basis of assumed differences than bringing them closer.

Our bilateral relations have seen many ups and downs since we both became independent. The baggage of history has bogged us down most often, thwarting the genuine wishes of the ordinary people across the borders to live in peace and harmony. Even in such trying circumstances, many well-meaning people in our two countries have endeavoured to break out of the supposed fetters imposed by history and promote goodwill among all, believing strongly that greater people-to-people contacts will enable better understanding and harmony. Even during difficult times in our relationship, such well-meaning persons kept the flame of friendship burning, so that a new dawn breaks over the South-Asian horizon, a dawn, bringing in its wake, peace, progress and prosperity to the peoples of the region. Let us salute these visionaries and activists who strive for friendship and fraternity and are working ceaselessly against many odds to realize that dream. And the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy occupies a pride of place among these sagacious leaders.

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* At the inauguration of the Seventh Joint Convention of the Pakistan-India peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy, New Delhi (25 February 2005).

Friends, it is universally acknowledged that peace, democracy and development are interdependent and inseparable. Our two countries have many socio-economic ills afflicting their body politic. Our socio-economic indicators leave much to be desired, even after five decades of freedom. Decision makers and policy planners in the two countries will have to work hard to shed the tag of underdevelopment. We need to prioritize areas of developmental concern and work relentlessly to achieve growth with equity. Increasingly, more and more people in our countries have voiced this view. When public opinion becomes more strident in favour of peace and progress, it will impact on the political leadership as well. And therein lies the key to open new vistas of consultation, cooperation and confidence building.

As you are aware, in the recent past, our respective Governments have taken several confidence-building measures in this direction. The resumption of the Samjhauta Express and the Delhi-Lahore bus service, the restoration of air links and over-flights, and increasing visits by pilgrim groups have been some significant measures in promoting people-to-people contacts. Only recently, the two Governments decided to open a direct cross-LoC bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad. Agreements have also been reached to establish a new bus service between Lahore and Amritsar. The two sides have also announced their decision to push ahead to operationalise the Khokarpar-Munabao rail service linking Rajasthan with Sind.

Apart from measures taken by our Governments from time to time, the overwhelming interest shown by our businessmen, peace activists, academics, media personnel, women activists, writers, artistes and sports personalities in promoting peace and harmony has generated a great degree of confidence and trust among our peoples. As you all know, there is a groundswell of goodwill among our peoples on which we should build the edifice of trust and brotherhood. We have great traditions in language, literature, fine arts, music, dance and films. The people of our two countries yearn to enjoy their rich traditions. The great response to festivals of music and dance of visiting troupes is an indication of this enthusiasm for our common cultural heritage which we should heartily encourage.

Both the countries share a passion for sports and games, particularly hockey, cricket, kabbadi and the like. The 'Friendship Series' of 2004 saw tens of thousands of Indians descending upon Pakistani cities to watch the cricket matches being given a red carpet welcome by the people of Pakistan. Our players won the 'Friendship Series' as also the hearts of millions of ordinary Pakistanis. Another dimension to our sporting relations has been the participation of several leading Pakistani hockey players in our Premier Hockey League. Similarly, we have the renowned Pakistani cricketer of yesteryears, Intekhab Alam, coaching the Punjab Cricket Team in India. These may seem small steps for individuals but giant strides for promoting

people-to-people contacts. I firmly believe that such measures would be of immense help in removing the elements of suspicion and mistrust that might exist between the two neighbours. Only when our people cross over to each other's country without unreasonable impediments and savour the warmth of hospitality, can the old mindset be changed and their misgivings removed. It is only through a people-centric path that we can address the various outstanding issues that corrode our relationship.

Goodwill missions and regular cultural exchanges can be of great help in promoting peace between India and Pakistan. Such endeavours would certainly revive in the hearts of our peoples the craving for peaceful co-existence and a spirit of brotherhood. In the recent past, we have witnessed a large number of political leaders, parliamentarians, academics, artistes and media personalities visiting each other's country in an effusive and friendly atmosphere as part of the Track 2 efforts in the peace process. In this context, I must mention that we were honoured to receive a Parliamentary Delegation from Pakistan two months back. We have had very meaningful interactions and exchange of views in a most friendly atmosphere with our parliamentary colleagues on diverse issues.

We also recall the visit of a team of Indian Parliamentarians to Pakistan in August 2003 under the banner of the South Asian Free Media Association. Parliamentarians, as peoples' representatives, and media personnel, as opinion makers, can play a crucial role in generating goodwill among the people. I read the other day that a group of college students from Lahore are in India and interacting with their counterparts in different Delhi colleges. We should necessarily build up on the shared sentiments of the younger generation; they are the ones who are not really tied down by the agony and anguish of the past and who can give new dimensions to cooperative relations with a futuristic perspective.

Friends, as all of you will agree, we cannot hope to achieve a respectable place in the comity of nations without first putting our house in order. You will also agree that there cannot be any good beginning for South Asia without friendly relationship between the two important countries of the sub-continent. For resolving the complex issues involving the emotions of millions of people on both sides of the border, we need to be firmly committed to carry forward our composite dialogue in a sustained manner. In fact, our countries must not lose any opportunity where there is scope for forward movement. Today, everybody in the sub-continent wants peace. The man on the street, the businessman, the industrialist, the sportsman, the writer, the film star, the musician and many others — both in India and Pakistan — are having the same dream of peace and amity. Our approach to the peace process must always be constructive and forward-looking, and in favour of understanding, flexibility and accommodation.

The sub-continent is currently going through a period of unprecedented optimism. We have had several rounds of dialogue on a range of issues and, more significantly, in a relatively peaceful and conducive atmosphere. We need to make concerted efforts to utilize this favourable climate and take all possible initiatives to address the various outstanding issues and establish a stable structure of cooperation in all areas, including trade and commerce.

In this context, the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD) is playing a great role in mobilizing individuals and various groups and associations concerned with equity, amity and basic freedoms and rights in their respective countries so as to realize the laudable objectives of peace and democracy in fulfilment of the aspirations of our peoples. All their earlier Joint Conventions have been quite effective in fostering better understanding, goodwill and good neighbourly relations between our two countries and also in highlighting the important issues which face both our countries which require attention. I compliment them on their efforts and urge upon those associated with the PIPFPD to carry on their crusade for peace and progress with renewed zeal.

Friends, it is now acknowledged that the 21st Century will be an Asian Century. If that were so, it rests upon the people and the leaders of India and Pakistan to help shape that Asian Century because, between the two of us, we are the forces to be reckoned with in the South Asian region. In spite of an indifferent past; let us now strive, to share a promising future — a future where peace, progress and prosperity will prevail in our two countries.

With these words, I am immensely pleased to inaugurate the seventh Joint Convention of the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy.

Thank you.

INDIA AND IRAN: ROAD-MAP FOR STRATEGIC COOPERATION*

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, Your Excellency, Dr. Gholamali Hadad Adel, and other distinguished members of your Parliamentary Delegation to India. Your visit gives us yet another opportunity to renew the friendship and understanding between the parliamentarians and peoples of India and Iran.

Excellency, India and Iran have enjoyed close historical links through the ages. The two countries have in the past influenced each other in the fields of language, religion, art, culture, architecture and other traditions. Our common cultural affinity and civilizational heritage provides a solid foundation for strengthening our cooperation in modern times. The commonality of views on various regional and international issues and our shared commitment to global peace and stability has further cemented the historical bond enjoyed by our countries. As the two major countries of Asia, I am sure, India and Iran can strengthen the cause of peace, stability and development in the world at large and in the region, in particular by coordinating their efforts and endeavours.

The exchange of visits at the highest levels in recent years has contributed towards further consolidation and strengthening of our relations. The Tehran Declaration signed during the visit of the then Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Iran in 2001 elevated our mutual relationship to a higher pedestal. President Dr. Mohammad Khatami's visit to India in January 2003 was a significant event not only for our bilateral relations but also in terms of structuring a framework for regional stability and peace. As many as eight agreements, including the New Delhi Declaration and an MoU on the Road Map to Strategic Cooperation, were signed during the visit. The Declaration laid out our vision for a strategic partnership between India and Iran for a more stable, secure and prosperous region and for enhanced regional and global cooperation.

The recent visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister Dr. Kamal Karrazi for attending the 14th Session of the India-Iran Joint Commission Meeting

* At the Banquet hosted in honour of the Iranian Parliamentary Delegation led by H.E. Dr. Gholamali Hadad Adel, Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Iran, New Delhi (28 February 2005).

underlines the commitment of the two countries towards high-level exchanges. I understand that several important decisions have been taken which would have great impact on our economic and commercial relations. Both countries are also interacting regularly in the security and strategic spheres and discussing bilateral, regional and international security issues.

Our countries also share a common concern at the growth of terrorism across the world. We believe that extremist ideologies manifested in the form of terrorism pose a threat to the civilized world. India and Iran are agreed upon strengthening the international consensus against terrorism.

Friends, India-Iran relations have been steadily growing in diverse spheres. Economic and commercial ties have been an important component of our relationship for long. The trade between our two countries has expanded significantly in recent years. Still, I feel that there is significant scope for further expansion of bilateral trade and investment not only in the area of oil but in the non-oil sector as well. We are actively working to address energy security and it is a matter of great satisfaction that both countries have agreed on the issue of import of natural gas to India for a period of twenty-five years beginning 2009.

Excellency, parliamentary institutions being the focal point of our democracies, it is essential that we encourage increased interaction between our Parliaments and parliamentarians. Such interaction is important to understand each other's perceptions on the issues and challenges that confront us and to learn from each other's experience. The Parliamentary Friendship Group that exists in our respective Parliaments represents a major step forward in the direction of further strengthening our parliamentary relations. I would like to emphasise that there is a consensus among us parliamentarians on intensifying our engagement with Iran and that India-Iran relations are special and need to be broadened further. I am sure that the current visit of your Parliamentary Delegation would go a long way in laying a stronger foundation for regular interaction among our parliamentarians.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now request you to raise a toast to the health and well-being of His Excellency Dr. Gholamali Hadad Adel and other members of the Iranian Parliamentary Delegation; to the progress and prosperity of the people of Iran and India; and to the ever-growing friendship between our two countries.

Thank you.

NON-RESIDENT INDIANS: AMBASSADORS AND PARTNERS IN PROGRESS*

It is a matter of great pleasure and honour for me to be with you on this historic occasion. I am grateful to the National Council of Indian Culture for inviting me and the members of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation to participate in this special commemorative function to mark the 160th Anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Trinidad and Tobago.

On this memorable day in 1845, about 225 indentured labour from India arrived in this beautiful country. It was indeed a journey into the future as far as your ancestors were concerned. Today, as inheritors of their precious legacy, you have evolved to constitute the heart and soul of a proud nation epitomizing what Mahatma Gandhi said: 'A nation's culture resides in the heart and the soul of its people'. It is a remarkable saga of a sizeable population of a single country coming for work, eventually settling down and making their homes in a foreign land. I congratulate each one of you on this memorable occasion.

Many people of Indian origin here in Trinidad and Tobago have done their ancestral land proud by their sterling performances in diverse fields, be it in politics, academics, industry, culture or literature. Expatriate Indians have occupied high offices in your country including that of the Prime Minister. They have enriched the Trinidadian culture and academic life and contributed to your industrial and economic development. Nobel Laureate, Sir V.S. Naipaul and several others, have dignified the world of literature too. You have indeed brought fame and name for this land of the Calypso, the Carnivals and the Steel Pan.

Any talk of India and Trinidad and Tobago cannot be complete without a reference to the world of cricket. Indians and the Caribbeans share the same passion for the gentlemen's game. Many of your cricket players are household names among the cricket lovers in our country. I am sure this holds true of Indian cricketers in Trinidad and Tobago as well. The Queens Park Oval at Port-of-Spain where Sunil Gavaskar displayed his cricket

* At the Special Commemorative Function organized by the National Council of Indian Culture, in honour of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, (30 May 2005).

wizardry is as much famous in India as the Eden Gardens in Kolkata is, in Trinidad and Tobago. Together, Sachin Tendulkar and Trinidadian Brian Lara have elevated cricket to a sublime level, giving joy to cricket aficionados across the world. I am sure when the next World Cup Cricket Tournament is held in the Caribbeans in 2007, many Indian fans will be here at Port-of-Spain not just to cheer the Indian team but to celebrate the beauty of the game of cricket.

As you all know, relations between India and Trinidad and Tobago go beyond the official and diplomatic formalities. Our friendly relations are marked by a special feeling and a bond which was built over the decades, through the commonalities of views on many issues and the strong cultural and historical bonds that exist between our peoples. We have been having exchange of delegations at the highest level. Over the years, we have been partners in progress and have signed many agreements and memoranda of understanding in diverse fields. The setting up of the Indian Cultural Centre in Trinidad and Tobago has a great emotional and symbolic significance for the people of Indian origin here. I am glad to know that the construction of the new Cultural Centre is expected to commence shortly. It is indeed remarkable that this Cultural Centre named after Mahatma Gandhi has facilities for teaching various Indian classical arts and the Hindi language. The setting up of two Chairs at the University of West Indies, one for History and the other for Hindi, is also very laudable. Being a member of the Commonwealth and also of the Non-Aligned Movement, the scope and opportunities for us to work together in the international fora are tremendous. We share common concerns and commitment on many issues which should facilitate common perceptions and common strategies as well.

Friends, as you all know, people of Indian origin have slowly and steadily emerged as distinct communities whichever country they are settled in. It is estimated that there are around 25 million people of Indian origin spread over 110 countries. They represent all cultural, linguistic and religious diversities that India has, from the North to the South and the East to the West. And together, they represent India overseas. You have assimilated well in your adopted countries and have become part of a new culture that is a synthesis of various cultures of the world. The exposure and experience you have gained over many decades are reflected in your economic and social life. You all have a special relationship with India and you all have a special place in our hearts too.

It is through the people of Indian origin that the presence of India is felt across the world. It is indeed remarkable that despite decades of separation from India, they are still maintaining and preserving the Indian values and traditions in their host countries. The most important aspect of this is that

today from mere cultural Ambassadors, today, for the people of India, they have emerged as partners in progress. They have also become part of realizing the vision of an 'Inclusive India' which belongs to all of us.

Friends, people of Indian origin across the world are a crucial component of the Indian development strategy. They are proving to be an extraordinary asset both to the country of their origin and to the country where they live. Along with them, the Indian professionals have also arrived, a development noticed by the world at large with awe and admiration. It is these professionals in various fields who have given a new recognition, a new respect, for India and Indians as a whole. A new image of a dynamic, vibrant and industrious India is thus emerging, thanks to the collaborative efforts of all of you.

The overseas Indians are now better placed in availing of more opportunities to invest in India. I believe that whatever be the field, we can cooperate and benefit from each other's experience and expertise. What is required is the creation of more employment opportunities and an enabling environment to invest and work. We invite you to share your skills and explore the possibilities for more investment in various fields in India. There are tremendous opportunities and possibilities for all of you to take advantage of and make meaningful investment in mutually beneficial projects for both the countries.

Friends, the Government of India has always attached great importance to the welfare of the people of Indian origin and recognized their valuable contributions. The holding of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, a get-together of people of Indian origin, has become a popular event in India and also for those who have settled outside India. It is yet another platform to bring together overseas Indians to understand one another better, to ascertain their aspirations and problems and assess the true potential of 'global India'.

As you would know, through the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2003, we have provided for grant of dual citizenship to persons of Indian origin in 16 specified countries. The creation of a separate Ministry of Non-Resident Indian Affairs is also an attempt to deal with the issues faced by the people of Indian origin in a more systematic and focused manner. All these reflect the seriousness which India attaches to the people of Indian origin and the respect and love India has for them. Permit me to reiterate that the people of Indian origin in Trinidad and Tobago occupy a pride of place in our esteem and affection.

With these words, I once again congratulate all of you on this memorable occasion. I thank the National Council of Indian Culture for the honour bestowed on me and the members of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation.

Thank you.

INDIA AND TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: DIVERSIFYING COOPERATION*

It is indeed a great privilege for me and the members of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation to be in this beautiful country of very gracious people. We are deeply touched by the warmth and affection extended to us ever since our arrival in Trinidad and Tobago. On behalf of the people and the Parliament of India, on behalf of my Delegation and on my own behalf, I have great pleasure in extending warm greetings to Your Excellency, members of your Parliament as also the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Excellency, India and Trinidad and Tobago are linked together through history. The beginning made in 1845 with the Ship *Fatel Razack* carrying Indians arriving in Trinidad and Tobago, bears the enduring stamp of an uninterrupted and continuous interaction between our two countries. In fact, yesterday, I had the privilege to be the Chief Guest at a function to commemorate the Indian Arrival Day in your country. Your Excellency, as you will agree, the landscape, art, music, dance, cuisine, religious edifice and customs in your country are all an illuminating testimony to the manner in which the Indians have been able to successfully integrate themselves into the culture and life of Trinidad and Tobago.

In keeping with the tradition of close contacts, the exchange of high level visits between our two countries over the last four decades have played a major role in giving a significant boost to our bilateral relationship. The visit of the then Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday to India in January 1997 as the Chief Guest at our Republic Day Celebrations resulted in the signing of a number of bilateral agreements. Carrying forward this success, the visit of our former Prime Minister Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee, to Trinidad and Tobago in February 1999 witnessed new dimensions to our shared perspectives on issues of common concern. Your Excellency, the bilateral agreement of February 2003 providing for an Inter-Governmental Joint Commission to oversee the progress and explore new areas of cooperation is yet another landmark, imparting a new direction to our age-old ties.

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* At the Banquet hosted by H.E. Mr. Barendra J. Sinanan, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in honour of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, (31 May 2005).

We are happy to see that Trinidad and Tobago has emerged as the largest and the most industrialized country in the Caribbean region. We are aware of the fact that your country is experimenting with several macroeconomic policies to improve the investment climate and to diversify its business and economy. In this context, we would like to share our experiences with you so as to realize the full potential of our bilateral cooperation. Trinidad and Tobago is doing well in the hydrocarbon, natural gas, petrochemical and metal sectors. We remain ready to assist in diversifying your efforts in diverse fields, including in agriculture, railways, small scale industries, low cost housing, information technology, biotechnology, banking and insurance services, etc.

We are indeed happy that India and Trinidad and Tobago have shared perceptions on a large number of international issues. We have to strive together to strengthen democracy, combat terrorism, promote international peace and security, encourage multilateralism and democratise the world order. In view of the global complexities and compulsions, one major area that has been engaging our attention is the need to strengthen and reform the multilateral institutions, including the United Nations. We have been constantly espousing the cause of a fair deal to the developing countries at the UN, WTO and other multilateral fora. We look forward to even closer global partnership between India and Trinidad and Tobago towards giving the world a genuinely democratic direction, truly reflecting the realities of the day.

Your Excellency, we attach great importance to regular parliamentary contacts between our two democracies, as we believe it will help in fostering greater understanding among our parliamentarians and peoples. We eagerly look forward to receiving a Parliamentary Delegation from Trinidad and Tobago in the near future. I am sure, this visit of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation will go a long way in further consolidating the warm and cordial relationship between India and Trinidad and Tobago.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now request you to join me in a toast to the health and happiness of Hon'ble Mr. Barendra J. Sinanan, Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the prosperity and well being of our nations and peoples, and to the long-standing friendship between India and Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

INDIA AND TURKEY: FROM FRIENDSHIP TO PARTNERSHIP*

It is a matter of great pleasure and an honour for me and the members of my Delegation to be with you today in this historic city. We are extremely grateful to Your Excellency for your kind invitation which has given us this opportunity to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the Parliaments and peoples of India and Turkey. We also recall with warmth Your Excellency's visit to our Parliament in December 2002 and the fruitful discussions our leaders had during that visit.

Excellency, India and Turkey have traditionally enjoyed warm and cordial relations. The two countries are inheritors of a glorious past and share a strong foundation of historical and cultural ties. In recent times, our contacts date back to the 1920s when India whole-heartedly supported Turkey's War of Independence and the formation of the Republic. Our countries were fortunate to have leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Kamal Ataturk who guided our Independence Movements. Kamal Ataturk, the Father of Modern Turkey, lives as much in the hearts and minds of the people of India as the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

Our two democracies, distinct in their own ways, have reasons to be proud of the successful functioning of our political systems. We both follow the parliamentary form of Government and, interestingly, our countries are presently having coalition governance. Our shared belief in secularism, democracy and the Rule of Law is the cornerstone of our mutual understanding. We need to endeavour to strengthen our values and traditions, more so in today's changing global environment, keeping in mind the emerging situations in our respective regions.

We have watched with keen interest the remarkable contribution of the Turkish leadership in bringing about a rapprochement among competing and often conflicting national interests in the region. I would like to convey through you, Excellency, our compliments to the His Excellency the President, Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, for his dynamic role in bringing radical reforms in the country's political system to harmonize it with democracies elsewhere.

* At the Banquet hosted by H.E. Mr. Bulent Arinc, Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, in honour of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation, Ankara, Turkey (13 June 2005).

We also take this opportunity to congratulate the Turkish leadership for the European Union's decision to start membership talks with Turkey. With your membership, Excellency, India will be privileged to have yet another friend in the European Union.

Friends, our political dialogue all these years have been of a commendably high order. The visit of His Excellency the Prime Minister, Mr. Bulent Ecevit, to India in 2000 elevated our relationship to a higher pedestal. The visit of the then Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to Turkey in September 2003 further strengthened and consolidated our relations. The recent visits of the Secretary-General of the Turkish National Security Council, General Sukru Sariisik, to India in April 2004, Admiral Madhvendra Singh, the Indian Naval Chief to Turkey in May 2004, and Air Chief Marshal, S.P. Tyagi, Chief of Air Staff to Turkey in May 2005, underline the commitment of our countries for strategic partnership between our nations.

Excellency, our countries have a commonality of views on various global issues, including securing and strengthening world peace and stability. India and Turkey, both victims of terrorism, are convinced that terrorism cannot be justified for whatever reasons; our two countries support a comprehensive approach against international terrorism. The signing of the Extradition Treaty to Combat Terrorism in 2001 between our countries was a move in this direction.

Friends, our bilateral relations are multifaceted and have steadily progressed in diverse spheres. From a stage of friendship and cooperation, we have entered a phase of proximity and partnership. Our economic ties, in the recent years, have been excellent. Our bilateral trade of over one billion US dollars has touched an all time high. We are happy that the Indo-Turkish Joint Working Group on Trade and Economic Issues has identified several areas such as construction, textiles, automobiles, electronics, tourism, bio-technology and railways to further intensify our cooperation.

Excellency, parliamentary institutions are the focal point of our democracies, and the interactions between Parliaments and parliamentarians offer opportunities to appreciate each other's concerns, aspirations and perceptions of the issues and challenges that confront us. The Parliamentary Friendship Group that exists in our two Parliaments is symbolic of our desire to intensify parliamentary exchanges which are a vital element in the partnership between the two countries. I hope our present visit would help in further deepening the understanding between India and Turkey and spread greater awareness of each other's rich cultural heritage and encourage people-to-people contacts.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now request you to join me in a toast to the health and happiness of His Excellency, Mr. Bulent Arinc, the Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, to the progress and prosperity of the people of India and Turkey, and to the long-standing friendship between our two countries.

Thank you.

INDIA AND MALAYSIA: TIME-TESTED RELATIONSHIP*

It gives me great pleasure to extend a hearty welcome to Your Excellency, Tan Sri Ramali Ngah Talib, and other distinguished members of your Parliamentary Delegation, on behalf of the people and the Parliament of India and on my own behalf. I am sure that this visit will provide you an opportunity to exchange views with a cross-section of our leaders, and in particular the parliamentary fraternity and also visit some areas of our country.

I recall with pleasure my meeting with Your Excellency as also His Excellency, Tan Sri Dr. Abdul Hamid Pawanteh, President of the Senate, in Kuala Lampur in April 2005 when the Malaysian Parliament extended its full support to the candidature of Shri Hashim Abdul Halim for the office of the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We greatly appreciate and value Malaysia's support in this regard.

Friends, India and Malaysia have enjoyed close and friendly ties through the ages. Both countries are fast-growing democracies committed to the lofty values of social equity, justice, Rule of Law and good governance practices. Our bilateral relations have been mutually beneficial, embracing various aspects—political, cultural, economic, educational, etc.

Ours is the largest working democracy in the world. In our parliamentary form of polity, all authority emanates from the people in whom vests the sovereignty. People exercise this through the Parliament at the Union level and through the State Legislatures in the States. Though there is a division of powers among the organs of State, *viz.*, the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary, Parliament has been assigned a pre-eminent position in our political set-up. Constitutionally and in practice, the Parliament and the Executive in India are linked together as partners in the conduct of public affairs.

The Malaysian polity has firmly established itself as a committed democracy and an inclusive structure in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. Along with Malaysia's social and economic development, this could be a template for emulation by other multi-ethnic societies.

* At the Banquet hosted in honour of the Malaysian Parliamentary Delegation led by H.E. Tan Sri Dato' Seri DiRaja Ramali bin Ngah Talib, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Parliament of Malaysia, New Delhi (26 July 2005).

Over the years, there have been regular exchanges of visits at the highest levels between India and Malaysia. The visit of the Malaysian Prime Minister, His Excellency, Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to India in December last year set the stage for increased economic collaboration between our two countries, thereby, raising the level of our bilateral relations to a higher pedestal. It was during this visit that our Prime Minister mooted the idea of a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement to be signed between the two countries. This Agreement, once concluded, will go a long way in reinforcing our bilateral relations, especially our economic ties.

Indian and Malaysian commercial links stretch back to the pre-Christian era. In modern times, both India and Malaysia have become major investors for each other with a number of joint ventures operating in the two countries. Today, there are nearly sixty Indian joint ventures operating in Malaysia in many areas, including in palm oil refining, manufacture of drugs and pharmaceuticals, metallurgical industries, communication services and power transmission, to mention only a few. In India too, since 1991, over seventy financial and technical joint ventures have been approved in diverse areas such as software production, agriculture, telephone equipment, food processing, industrial machinery, etc.

Friends, we greatly appreciate that Malaysia, which inherited a commodity-based economy dominated by two commodities—rubber and tin—has successfully developed to one focused on manufacturing and is now progressing fast towards becoming a knowledge-based economy. We are indeed pleased that today Malaysia is India's second largest trading partner in the ASEAN region, after Singapore. The strong foundation in our relationship also lies in the area of investment. Malaysia ranks second in terms of FDI approved by the Government of India from the ASEAN region. A number of Malaysian companies are presently participating in the infrastructure projects in India.

The changing dimensions of the international financial and monetary architecture have brought many new players into the conduct of international business. Our two countries are an integral part of the most dynamic Asia-Pacific region which has a vital role in the global economy. Therefore, to meet the multifarious challenges of the times, it is important for us to forge closer cooperation for advancing our economic interests, both at the regional and the multilateral levels.

India and Malaysia have long-standing cultural relations as well. We have been cooperating in the field of education, art and culture, sports and youth activities and mass media. With over 1.8 million people of Indian origin in Malaysia, we both can channelise our cultural cooperation in a more coordinated manner for the benefit of our peoples.

Friends, exchange of Parliamentary Delegations goes a long way in promoting people-to-people contacts between countries. In fostering mutual understanding among peoples, we, the parliamentarians, have an important role to play. The visits of the Malaysian Parliamentary Delegations to India in 1961 and 1988, and the visit of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation to Malaysia in 1987 have been quite important in consolidating our friendly relations. With the current visit of the Malaysian Parliamentary Delegation, a more active phase in Indo-Malaysian parliamentary exchanges is now underway and I feel confident about our ever growing friendship and of closer identity of views and of mutual co-operation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now request you to join me in a toast to the health and happiness of His Excellency, Tan Sri Ramali Ngah Talib and other members of the Malaysian Parliamentary Delegation; to the progress and prosperity of the people of Malaysia; and to the ever-growing friendship between India and Malaysia.

Thank you.

INDIA AND FIJI: PROMOTING GREATER COOPERATION*

It is an honour for me and my wife and my colleagues from India to be associated with the inauguration of the Lautoka Centre of the Indian Cultural Centre. I have had an earlier opportunity to visit this beautiful country and enjoy its matchless and warm hospitality. Almost a quarter of a century ago, I came to attend the CPA Conference held in Fiji in 1981. Over these years, this country has grown more beautiful, more prosperous and the hospitality more cordial.

We are grateful to the Fiji Girmit Council for inviting us to this function, which gives us an opportunity to interact with the Indian community in Fiji. The Girmit Council, as an umbrella organization of ten major social, cultural and religious organizations of Indians in Fiji, has been doing pioneering work in diverse fields for the welfare of their community. An organization like the Girmit Council is of immense help in providing a forum for people of Indian origin in Fiji to come together and strengthen their socio-cultural bonds amongst themselves as well as contributing towards the overall development of Fiji. I extend to you my very best wishes in all your endeavours.

Friends, the relations between India and Fiji go beyond the official and diplomatic formalities and are marked by a special bond. When your forefathers the Girmitiyas first arrived in Fiji in 1879 they no doubt faced great tribulations and suffering. But through their blood, sweat and toil, they built a life not only for themselves and their future generations but contributed immensely towards building of Fiji which is your country. They had the option and the opportunity to return to India but a majority of them preferred to make their home here itself.

Over the decades, you have greatly contributed towards the socio-economic development of your adopted land. Many of you have achieved considerable success in different fields such as politics, industry, business, entrepreneurship, academics, sports and culture and you have made us feel proud about your significant contributions. We are delighted every time Vijay Singh tees off in golf courses across the world, bringing laurels for himself and his country, as the best in the game of golf, as also when we see people of Indian origin everywhere excel in their respective areas of work.

* At the inauguration of the Sub-Centre of the Indian Cultural Centre, Lautoka, Fiji (8 September 2005).

Friends, relations between countries are invariably influenced by the extent of trade, commerce, bilateral exchanges, etc., and this is as it should be. But equally important is the emotional or human dimension. The relations between Fiji and India have been especially marked by the emotional bond primarily brought about by the Indian community in this country. In this regard, I gather that the small Indian expatriate population comprising professionals like doctors, academics and IT specialists has also been a contributing factor in further cementing our relations. I would like to stress that greater people-to-people contacts are indeed the bedrock of friendly and mutually beneficial relations among nations.

On the governmental plane, I understand that the Government of India has offered various scholarships covering education and culture under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme and also through the Indian Council of Cultural Relations. The trade relations between our countries, though small, are growing steadily. I am happy to learn that the Sugar Technology Mission of the Government of India has submitted detailed reports to Fijian authorities for the revival and restructuring of the sugar industry in Fiji . There is tremendous scope for bilateral co-operation in the fields like information technology, agriculture, health and small scale industries. There is also ample scope for our two countries to co-operate in international bodies like the United Nations and its various agencies and to work together for a better and more democratized world order. The opening of the Fijian High Commission in New Delhi in January 2004 has also been a very positive development in our relations.

The Government of India has recognized the valuable contributions made by people of Indian origin in varied fields. In this regard, the holding of the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*, a get-together of people of Indian origin, is an important initiative the Government has taken. Started in 2003, it brings together overseas Indians to understand one another better, to ascertain their aspirations and to maintain better contacts with their specific areas of origin in India. As you are aware, Shri Mahendra Chaudhary was awarded the prestigious *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* at the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* in 2004. This year, Vijay Singh, the living legend of golf, was awarded the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Award*. This shows how keenly we are following your progress in Fiji and take pride in your achievements.

Our Parliament had passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2003, providing for grant of dual citizenship to persons of Indian origin in 16 specified countries. The two Houses of Parliament, in its latest Session have passed a Bill further broadening its scope, by amending the Citizenship Act, which has already been brought into force, providing for Overseas Citizenship of India to overseas Indians who migrated from India after 26 January 1950, as long as their home countries allow dual citizenship under their local laws, excepting those of Pakistan and Bangladesh. I hope that

Overseas Indians across the world will find the provision useful. The creation of a separate Ministry of Non-Resident Indian Affairs in 2004 is also an effort in this direction. Undoubtedly, all these reflect the importance which we attach to the people of Indian origin and the love and respect we have for them.

Friends, I would like to reiterate that the Indians settled in Fiji occupy a pride of place in our esteem and affection. The Indian Parliamentary Delegation is here attending the 51st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference being hosted by Fiji . During the last one week and more, we have experienced how Fiji is marching ahead on the path of progress and prosperity and the substantial contribution of the people of Indian origin in this regard.

I am proud that the Indian community in Fiji constitutes a vibrant part of the process of development in this country. If I may say so, a country can be assured of steady progress if there is united effort by all sections of its people – without any discrimination or denial of right. History shows that national integration and unity is the key to success. No one section should feel ignored or kept out of the national mainstream. We should emphasise on those aspects which unify the people than divide them. A citizen's first duty is no doubt to the country to which he or she belongs or to one which he or she adopts as one's own. In the great journey for the future building of this beautiful country, no doubt people of Indian origin will continue to make signal contribution and all sections of the people should be equal partners in the pursuit of progress and development. India has shown that amongst the people there is basic unity in diversity and an inclusive society is the key to peace and prosperity. This country has great leadership including very responsible leadership provided by the people of Indian origin and a great future and we shall go back with the assured feeling that people of Indian origin, who form an important and integral part, are playing their role in different spheres in a very large measure.

We greatly value your ties with India and we urge you to make use of the many opportunities that India offers for our mutual benefit. We believe that this unit of the Indian Cultural Centre here at Lautoka will greatly succeed in cementing our relations further and maintaining and nurturing the cultural identity. I am greatly thankful to the Fiji Girmit Council for the honour bestowed on me by inviting me to inaugurate this Centre. I once again wish you the very best in all your endeavours.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Sub-Centre of the Indian Cultural Centre here.

Thank you.

INDIA AND BRITAIN: A MULTI-FACETED RELATIONSHIP*

It is my honour and privilege to extend on behalf of the people and Parliament of India and on my own behalf, to Your Excellency Lord Paul and the other distinguished members of the British Parliamentary Delegation, a very warm and cordial welcome to our country. Your visit gives us yet another opportunity to renew the bonds of friendship and understanding between the peoples and parliamentarians of India and the United Kingdom.

India and UK share many common values, including commitment to democracy, human dignity and the Rule of Law. Both countries have a great deal of cultural and ethnic diversity and immensely value multiculturalism and have commonality of perceptions and identity of views on many issues. We believe our two countries, which have long heritage and historical ties, can contribute substantially to the strengthening of international peace and security and the establishment of a just and stable world order.

Our relations indeed are multi-faceted and encompass cooperation in a wide range of fields. Regular contacts between India and the UK have not only facilitated exchange of views on various international issues but also enabled us to work substantially on our joint approaches to the new order taking shape in the world. The momentum of high level visits in the past few years has indeed been impressive. Our Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh visited the United Kingdom in September 2004 and again in July this year in a different context, and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair was here in India only last month. The Joint Declaration signed in September 2004 during our Prime Minister's visit to the United Kingdom set out a new strategic partnership between our countries. This initiative has identified key areas of cooperation in our strategic relations, with focus on reinforcing our partnership in foreign and defence policy, on combating terrorism, expansion of economic ties and intensifying cooperation, among others, in the areas of science and technology, education and culture. During the India-UK Summit at Udaipur on 8 September 2005, a wide range of subjects of mutual interest were discussed. Two agreements relating to air services and cooperation in hydrocarbons were signed while two other agreements on co-production of films and on intellectual property rights were finalized.

* At the Banquet in honour of the British Parliamentary Delegation led by H.E. Lord Paul of Marylebone, New Delhi (11 October 2005).

Economic and commercial ties play a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations. The United Kingdom is India's largest trading partner in Europe. The two-way trade of goods and trade in services have both been growing. The United Kingdom continues to be an important source of foreign investment in India. India has also emerged as a significant investor in the United Kingdom. However, efforts should be made to further encourage more trade and business relations between the two countries, as the present level of bilateral trade does not commensurate with its true potential.

Indo-British relations are further strengthened by the nearly 1.5 million people of Indian origin in the United Kingdom. Your Lordship has shown how friendship and common pursuit of cherished values can help our two countries and how we can contribute to each other's progress and development in numerous spheres. Our relations are a vital bond between our two countries, facilitating extensive people-to-people contacts in a range of areas. India's intellectual and academic association with the United Kingdom has also further deepened the same and I have no doubt that both countries have been benefited thereby.

The world today is beset with many problems, which warrant concerted action. In this regard, India and the United Kingdom share a common concern at the growth of terrorism across the world. India has been a victim of this evil for many decades. In fact, there was a terrorist attack on our Parliament building, which symbolizes the largest parliamentary democracy in the world. The recent terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom have clearly underscored the gravity of the scourge of terrorism. Both countries are convinced that terrorism poses a serious threat to the civilized world, and democratic and civilizational values, and are agreed upon strengthening the international consensus against this evil. As part of the international community, we believe that we should work together to strengthen effective multilateralism. To us there can be no substitute to friendship and goodwill. Alternative to peace is war or armed conflict, which every country should avoid. Happiness and prosperity of each country and of its people can be achieved by mutual cooperation and mutual respect and that will help in ushering durable peace and development.

India greatly values its relations with the Commonwealth and has been an active partner in pursuing the Commonwealth's fundamental ideas and principles. We have also been closely associated with the varied activities of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. As you all know, Mr. Hasim Abdul Halim, Hon'ble Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, has recently been elected the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CPA. I am sure this will add a new dimension to India's relations with the Commonwealth community. Commonwealth and CPA provide us with an

important platform to espouse and follow the true spirit of the Commonwealth, based on respect for each other. In a spirit of brotherhood we can help each other to develop and pool our efforts so that those, who need help can be assisted by others, not as a matter of charity but in discharge of duty to a fellow member of the Commonwealth.

We have also close and cooperative relations with the European Union. The Joint Action Plan adopted at the Sixth Indo-EU Summit in New Delhi in September 2005 is a significant document, seeking to reinforce cooperation and engagement over the entire gamut of interaction as envisaged by the Strategic Partnership agreed to by the two sides. We are indeed happy that under the presidency of the United Kingdom, India-EU cooperation has reached a qualitatively new level.

Friends, it goes without saying that exchange of Parliamentary Delegations plays a vital role in strengthening people-to-people contacts as also between the countries. In this connection, I recall with pleasure that there has been a substantial number of exchanges of visits of Parliamentary Delegations between our two countries during the last three decades or so. We place special emphasis on such parliamentary exchanges for their role in maintaining a positive momentum in bilateral relations as also in transforming these relations into a vibrant partnership. The formation of the India-United Kingdom Parliamentary Friendship Group underlines the importance that we both attach to our relationship.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now request you to raise a toast to the health and well-being of His Excellency Lord Paul of Marylebone and other distinguished members of the British Parliamentary Delegation; to the progress and prosperity of the peoples of India and the UK; and to the ever-growing friendship between our two countries.

Thank you.

INDIA AND TAJIKISTAN: LONG-STANDING FRIENDSHIP*

It is indeed a matter of great honour and pleasure for me to extend, on behalf of the people and Parliament of India and on my own behalf, a warm welcome to Your Excellency Mr. Saidullo Khairulloev, and the other distinguished members of your Parliamentary Delegation. I am particularly delighted to welcome you since this is the first visit of a Tajikistan Parliamentary Delegation to India. I hope your stay in India will be comfortable and enjoyable and our interaction will be beneficial for both our countries.

Excellency, both India and Tajikistan have had close ties throughout history and have enjoyed cordial relations. Indo-Tajik relations are as old as the silk route and the contacts between our peoples go back to centuries. These interactions have helped to strengthen our relationship in the recent past as well. Excellency, frequent exchanges of high level visits between India and Tajikistan are a testimony to our growing friendship. We eagerly look forward to the visit of the President of Tajikistan, His Excellency, Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, later this year.

India and Tajikistan share a commonality of views on a wide range of issues and are deeply committed towards maintaining peace and stability in the region. We highly appreciate Tajikistan's support for India in various UN forums. In the regional context too, we have a regular dialogue.

The close historical and geographical ties between India and Tajikistan have been further cemented by co-operation and collaboration in many areas. It is heartening to note that a sound institutional and legal framework has been created through a number of bilateral agreements leading to economic, technical and commercial cooperation between our two countries. The setting up of the Indo-Tajik Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, the bilateral investment protection agreement, the air services agreement and the agreement on long-term cooperation in the field of trade, economy and industry are some of the important measures taken by our

* At the Banquet hosted in honour of the Tajikistan Parliamentary Delegation led by H.E. Mr. Saidullo Khairulloev, Chairman of the Majlis-e-Namayandagon of Tajikistan, New Delhi (15 May 2006).

countries. Starting from 1991, the economic and trade relations between India and Tajikistan have been growing steadily. Tajikistan's strengthening economy, stable national institutions and our growing friendship are indeed further widening the scope of our bilateral relations.

Excellency, India and Tajikistan have close relations in the cultural field as well. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations has been offering scholarships for Tajik citizens for Post-Graduate and Doctoral studies in India. Besides, many Tajik nationals have been undergoing training in India in diverse fields such as information technology, banking and finance, management, industrial development and rural development under our ITEC Programme which would help to build capacity within Tajik Ministries and Government organizations.

Excellency, both India and Tajikistan share a common commitment to parliamentary democracy. We, in India, have keenly watched and greatly appreciated the successful completion of the electoral process to the Parliament as well as the local bodies in your country last year. We heartily congratulate the people of Tajikistan and extend our whole-hearted support to them in their endeavours towards building a modern plural society.

Excellency, parliamentary institutions being the nodal point of our countries, it is imperative that we encourage increased interaction between our Parliaments and parliamentarians. Such interaction is important to better understand and appreciate each other's concerns, aspirations and perceptions on issues and challenges that confront us. I am confident that this first visit by a Tajik Parliamentary Delegation to India will be an important milestone in our bilateral relationship.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now request you to join me in a toast to the health and happiness of His Excellency Mr. Saidullo Khairulloev and the other members of the Tajikistan Parliamentary Delegation; to the progress and prosperity of the peoples of Tajikistan and India; and to the long-standing friendship between our two countries.

Thank you.

NEPAL: MARCHING TOWARDS DEMOCRACY*

It is indeed a matter of honour for me to have the opportunity to associate myself with this important Seminar, organized to celebrate and debate the restoration of democracy in Nepal. The people of Nepal, through their non-violent struggle, have once again demonstrated that no power can suppress the democratic aspirations of the masses and that it is futile to seek to do so. Unfortunately, the road to democracy for Nepal has been tough and turbulent. We should use this opportunity to salute the sagacity of the people and pay our tribute to the memory of the martyrs who laid down their lives for the cause of their freedom and democratic rights. What is significant today is that the spirit and endurance of the people have triumphed, through a non-violent struggle, against what they found to be an oppressive regime, and in victory, they are demonstrating extraordinary grace, magnanimity and the farsightedness to lay the foundations for lasting democracy in the country.

Bound together by factors of history, culture and geography, the people of India and Nepal also share a common commitment to democracy. We in India, like its other neighbours, have been watching with concern the developments in Nepal in the past few years. India firmly believes that the challenges before the countries of the region could be effectively addressed only under democratic governance. Therefore, India has been looking up to with great interest the march of Nepal towards democracy once again. The recent outpouring of sentiments in favour of democracy in Nepal, braving grave adversities, was a testimony to the desire for and commitment towards democratic governance among her people.

The greatest virtue of democracy is that it is a system that authentically represents the people and as such, it is expected of it to be sensitive to their urges, aspirations, hopes and even their frustrations. At this critical juncture for the Nepalese democracy, one of the crucial tasks for everyone associated with the system is to take the initiatives for laying the necessary institutional foundations for a healthy parliamentary, secular democratic system for the country, with vision and imagination. The role, functions and responsibilities of the different components constituting the system should be discussed and defined in detail with equanimity and clearly laid down in the framework for governance.

* At the inauguration of the Seminar on Nepal, organised by the South Asia Foundation and the Vichar Nyas, New Delhi (22 May 2006).

I would however, hasten to add that the sustenance of democracy is a difficult process. Laying the institutional foundations is only the beginning. What is of even greater importance is the way these institutions deliver. If we allow wide gaps to emerge between the expectations of the people and the performance of the system, consolidation of democracy will be difficult to achieve.

The people of Nepal have many unfulfilled dreams and desires. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all the stakeholders of democracy there to work together to address the concerns of the people. Without stifling dissent, the system should now work with dedication and commitment to consolidate democracy and freedom and endeavour to take the country on a new path of all inclusive development so that the deprivations suffered by the people over the years remain a thing of the past and the people will develop a new respect and trust in democracy as the best system with answers for their problems. It can take heart from the fact that such a diverse and vast nation as India has made a success of the democratic system, imperfections apart.

As you may have noted, Indian electoral politics invariably throws up surprises. That is the nature of democracy and that is how people hold the system accountable. Nepal's democracy is still taking its first tentative steps. But the road ahead is going to be tricky and trying for the people and the leadership of Nepal as well.

The people's movement in Nepal, rightly described as a *mitti ki andolan*, by one of their leaders, has ushered in democracy and has become a talking point across the world. Now the rest of the world will also be watching what the people and the government make out of it. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is a veteran democrat and a seasoned and wise leader. We in India are delighted to see that such a person has been chosen democratically to head the new Nepal. He and his colleagues had suffered a great deal in their attempts to fulfil the democratic aspirations of the Nepali people. India will continue to support him in his endeavour to build true democracy and bring about an acceptable level of development for the country.

Today the focus of democracies everywhere is not so much on its form but more on the substance, on what it delivers for the people. That is the challenge before the present political leadership of Nepal as well. Building democratic institutions and sustaining them, it has to become an instrument for positive socio-economic transformation addressing the issues of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, infrastructure development, among others, and thereby meeting the requirements for a dignified human existence under conditions of freedom and enjoying democratic rights.

Today the country is at crossroads. It has suffered badly during these years of strife and chaos. Its economy is in bad shape. The new leadership has to put the economy back on the trajectory of growth. It is a challenging task. But with the united endeavours of the people and the Government, the mission can be and will be accomplished. We extend our best wishes to the people and the Government in this effort.

Dissent and debate are the cornerstones of democracy. What is important is to know the limit of dissent and to be united on the imperatives of development, to achieve an acceptable level of socio-economic equity, effective representation for all sections of the people in the political processes, to carry all sections of the people along the path of development and to have a commitment to make a success of the democratic experiments through collective effort. Providing institutions of governance is much easier than making them function in a manner sensitive to the needs of the people, accommodating the concerns of the marginalised, and with an all inclusive and long-term vision for the whole country. Towards the end of the deliberations of India's Constituent Assembly, its President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, had exhorted its Members stating:

> We have prepared a democratic Constitution. But successful working of democratic institutions requires in those who have to work them willingness to respect the view-points of others, capacity for compromise and accommodation...

I am sure, today's discussions will be fruitful and enriching and out of it will emerge finer points that will contribute towards peace, prosperity and democratic consolidation in Nepal. With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate this Seminar.

Thank you.

INDIA AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: NATURAL PARTNERS IN THE EMERGING WORLD ORDER*

It is indeed a matter of great honour and pleasure for me to extend, on behalf of the people and Parliament of India, and on my own behalf, a warm welcome to Your Excellency, Mr. Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament and the distinguished members of your Excellency's Delegation. I hope your stay in India will be comfortable and enjoyable and the interactions here will be rewarding for both India and the European Union.

Excellency, India and the European Union, representing the largest democracies in the world, are two of the foremost examples of multi-culturalism, as also multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies. This makes us natural partners in the world today. Our relations, dating back to the early 1960s, have grown exponentially from what used to be a purely trade and economic driven relationship to diverse areas of mutual interest. The Joint Political Statement of 1993, together with the Cooperation Agreement of 1994, opened the way for annual ministerial meetings and broad political dialogue. Regular annual India-EU Summits held since 2000 have greatly enriched our bilateral relations and the Fifth Summit at The Hague was a landmark, for it endorsed the EU's proposal to upgrade our relationship to the level of 'Strategic Partnership'. The Sixth Summit held in New Delhi in September 2005 approved a comprehensive Joint Action Plan setting out a roadmap for India-EU interactions in diverse sectors. India attaches great importance to its relations with the EU and it is the first ever Joint Action Plan that India has entered into with any partner and we are indeed happy with the good progress made on the various issues envisaged by the Plan.

Economic and commercial ties have been an important component of India-EU relationship. The India-EU trade has been growing steadily, reaching Euros 40 billion in 2005. The EU, as a bloc of 25 nations, is India's largest trading partner. In 2005, India was the 14th largest exporter to the EU, the 11th largest importer of EU products and the EU's 10th largest trading partner. Moreover, the EU is the second largest source of Foreign Direct Investment for India. All these are indicative of the substantial trade relations that we have nurtured over the years.

* At the Banquet hosted in honour of the Parliamentary Delegation from the European Parliament led by H.E. Mr. Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament, New Delhi (30 September 2006).

It is a matter of great satisfaction that India and the EU have agreed to take positive steps to further increase bilateral trade and economic cooperation and to remove the barriers to trade and investment, like the setting up of a High Level Trade Group; dialogue on issues relating to the World Trade Organisation and the Doha Development Agenda, including technical barriers to trade; sanitary and phytosanitary issues; trade defence instruments; services, etc.

Excellency, India and the EU have agreed to further intensify dialogue as per our agreement on the Joint Action Plan by strengthening the existing mechanisms as well as by initiating them in new areas of cooperation, including pluralism and diversity; regional cooperation (EU and SAARC); and democracy and human rights. In line with our mutuality of views, we have also agreed for greater cooperation in the areas of effective multilateralism, peacekeeping, peace-building and post-conflict assistance; disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and the fight against terrorism and organized crime. Both India and the European Union recognize and are of the view that terrorism constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. As you are well aware, there were incidents of terrorist attacks in India recently at Mumbai and a few weeks ago at Malegaon, in which over 200 and over 30 innocent people, respectively, lost their lives and several hundreds got injured. We reaffirm our strong condemnation of all acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations as criminal and unjustifiable, irrespective of their motives. We look forward to continued India-EU cooperation to root out this menace.

I am happy to note that opportunities for partnership and collaboration in new areas in the economic and science & technology sectors, including environment, clean development and climate change, energy, information and communication technologies, transport, space technology, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, agriculture, customs, employment and social policy, business cooperation, etc. are growing. Both India and EU believe in bringing peoples and cultures together. To foster closer people-to-people ties, we have agreed to hold dialogue on migration and consular issues; facilitate parliamentary, education and academic and civil society exchanges; cultural cooperation; and work to increase mutual visibility.

Excellency, since parliamentary institutions are the focal point of our democracies, it is essential that we encourage increased interactions between our Parliaments and parliamentarians. Such interactions are important to understand each other's perceptions on issues of common concern as also to learn from our experiences. India and the European Union have been facilitating regular exchanges of visits by Parliamentary Delegations. The visit gives us the opportunity to renew the friendship and understanding between the parliamentarians and the peoples of India and the EU.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now request you to join me in a toast to the health and happiness of His Excellency, Mr. Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament and the distinguished members of the European Parliamentary Delegation; to the progress and prosperity of the peoples of the European Union and India; and to the ever-growing friendship and cooperation between our two Parliaments.

Thank you.

INDIA AND ICELAND: NEW MOMENTUM IN BILATERAL RELATIONS*

It is a matter of great honour and pleasure for me to extend, on behalf of the people and the Parliament of India, and on my own behalf, a very warm welcome to Your Excellency, Madame Solveig Petursdottir, and the other distinguished members of your Parliamentary Delegation. I am particularly delighted to welcome you since this is the first ever visit of an Icelandic Parliamentary Delegation to India. I hope your stay in India will be comfortable and enjoyable, and I am confident that our interactions will impart a new thrust to our bilateral relations.

Madame President, both India and Iceland have long historical past, though bilateral contacts and exchanges between us have been few and far between. In recent years, happily our relations have picked up with the needed momentum. The process which began with the visit of President Mr. Olafur Ragnar Grimsson in October-November 2000 has added a new impetus to our relationship. We highly appreciate the support extended by Iceland to India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council during that visit and its reiteration on subsequent occasions. We also warmly recall President Grimsson's visit to India again in February last year and the visit of the Science, Education and Culture Minister, Ms. Thorgerdur Katrin Gunnarsdottir, earlier this year. In this context, we eagerly look forward to the forthcoming visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Iceland to India early next year.

Our Hon'ble President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam visited Iceland in May last year. This visit saw the initialling of an Air Services Agreement and an MoU was entered into on Foreign Office Consultations. This was followed by the visits of several of our Union Ministers in the last one year. These high level visits have opened up many areas of cooperation between India and Iceland. In an important development, India and Iceland have agreed to collaborate on the setting up of an International Centre for Earthquake Precursor Studies in India. The inauguration of the Resident Mission of Iceland in New Delhi recently is another significant milestone in Indo-Icelandic bilateral relations. Very soon we will see the setting up of an Indian Mission

* At the Banquet hosted in honour of the Icelandic Parliamentary Delegation led by H.E. Ms. Solveig Petursdottir, President of the Althingi of Iceland, New Delhi (20 November 2006).

in Iceland. These measures, I am sure, will see more and more people-to-people contact between our countries which can go a long way in consolidating our friendship.

Madame President, there are various areas in which both our countries can cooperate, including trade and economic relations which form the backbone of bilateral friendship and cooperation. But the annual trade between India and Iceland is still in its nascent stages, being at US $ 22.21 million in 2005. But there exists immense potential for increasing our bilateral trade. There are many more unexplored areas in which our two countries can cooperate and march together on the path of development. India would like to cooperate with Iceland and benefit from its expertise in the fields of geo-thermal and hydrogen energy, gene-mapping, fisheries and the technology for anticipating seismological activity. India's expertise in information technology, biotechnology, consumer goods and textiles, and pharmaceuticals, can be utilized in further consolidating our bilateral ties.

Excellency, India and Iceland share a deep commitment to democracy. Parliamentary institutions have been in existence in both our countries since ancient days and have become stronger with the passage of time. We consider parliamentary contacts as an important dimension in our bilateral relationship. Through these contacts, the people's representatives are able to appreciate each other's concerns and objectives and we can benefit by exchanging the experiences of each other. I am sure this first ever visit of the Parliamentary Delegation from Iceland will go a long way in deepening our friendship and encouraging mutual cooperation in diverse fields.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now request you to join me in a toast to the health and happiness of Her Excellency, Madame Solveig Petursdottir, President of the Althingi, and the distinguished members of the Icelandic Parliamentary Delegation; to the progress and prosperity of the peoples of Iceland and India; and to the growing friendship and cooperation between our two countries.

Thank you.

INDIA AND JAPAN: SHARED VISION FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD ORDER*

I have great pleasure in extending, on behalf of the members of the Indian Parliament and on my own behalf, our sincere gratitude to Your Excellency for your inspiring address in this august gathering. Your Excellency's presence here in the historic Central Hall of Parliament House and the Address will greatly help in consolidating the long-standing friendship between our two countries.

We are extremely honoured, Your Excellency, that your visit coincides with the Sixtieth Anniversary of our Independence, the celebrations of which commenced only last week from this very Central Hall, which has been witness to many other important events in our nation's history. I am sure the current series of exchanges at the highest level between India and Japan will prove to be immensely beneficial in further strengthening our cooperative relationship.

Excellency, India and Japan, both continental neighbours, share a proud civilisational heritage, with friendly ties between our countries going back to many centuries. The foundation of our relationship is traced back to the Sixth Century A.D. when Buddhism was introduced in Japan. Since then, we have had a long history of religious, cultural, economic and literary exchanges. Our Nobel laureate, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had a long association with many Japanese scholars and had always spoken admiringly and eloquently of Japanese culture and literary heritage.

As expressed in the dissenting opinion of Justice Radhabinod Pal at the War Tribunal and through the cultural, religious and literary interactions in recent years, India and Japan have shared a vision for a peaceful world order where Asia will have a prominent role to play. Our friendship has emerged stronger over the years and today it has entered a new era of cooperation in diverse fields.

Excellency, our two nations are deeply committed to democracy, human rights and the Rule of Law. We fully recognise the scope and need of working

* At the address of H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, to the members of Parliament of India, Central Hall, Parliament House, New Delhi (22 August 2007).

together not only for our mutual benefit but also for peace and prosperity in Asia and the world at large. Your current visit to our country has further accelerated the process of rejuvenating and expanding our mutual relations.

Excellency, we are happy that our two countries have taken several initiatives, the latest being the India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership and the India-Japan Parliamentary Forum. The declaration of the current year as the India-Japan Friendship Year, I am sure, will herald a new era in consolidating our cooperative endeavours.

Both India and Japan are, today, deeply involved in the stupendous task of revitalising our economy and improving the living conditions of our people. Endowed with a vast reservoir of human resource, we greatly wish to benefit from Japan's proven strength in various fields through bilateral cooperation.

Excellency, exchange of Parliamentary Delegations has helped us in conducting dialogues on issues of mutual interest. We are indeed happy that we have had the honour of hosting four Japanese Parliamentary Delegations in the past. So far, five Indian Parliamentary Delegations have also visited Japan. I myself had the honour of leading an Indian Parliamentary Delegation to Japan in October–November 2004. The formation of the India-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group is a testimony to our continued commitment to further consolidate our ties at the parliamentary level to develop better understanding of the bilateral and global issues and to enhance the feeling of solidarity among the peoples of our two countries.

Excellency, we believe that the Twenty-first Century will be an Asian Century and as is widely acknowledged, India and Japan will be the key performers in actualizing that ideal. Your Address to the members of the Indian Parliament has delineated a road map for making that happen through enhanced cooperation between our countries. We, in India, regard you as a valued and trusted friend, and I am confident that your current visit will open up new vistas of India-Japan cooperation which will help in further consolidating our historical ties. I would like to thank you once again for your extremely thought-provoking address to the members of Parliament. I would also like to thank the Hon'ble Vice-President and the Hon'ble Prime Minister for their gracious presence here which reaffirms our faith in the friendly ties between India and Japan.

Before I conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to convey to Your Excellency, to the members of your Delegation, to the members of the National Diet and to the friendly people of Japan, the greetings and good wishes of the members of the Indian Parliament and the people of India.

Thank you.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS' COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE OF THE SMALL COUNTRIES*

I have great pleasure in offering a hearty welcome to the Distinguished Delegates to this 27th Conference of Parliamentarians of Small Countries from the Commonwealth community. We are indeed privileged that Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, the Hon'ble Vice-President of India and Chairman of Rajya Sabha, has kindly consented to inaugurate this Conference and address this august gathering.

As the distinguished Delegates are aware, ours is a country of continental dimensions, marked by widespread diversities, but there is an underlying unity in our diversity, our cultural heritage and a pluralistic ethos that nurtures an inclusive democracy and the spirit of co-existence and tolerance among our people. I am sure, the distinguished Delegates, during their stay in India, will be able to see the varied shades of our rich and diverse cultural life, and our achievements over the decades since Independence, besides getting a feel of the functioning of our representative institutions.

We, in India, are proud of the fact that we are the world's largest working democracy that has thrived and flourished in spite of many odds and multifarious challenges. As we celebrate the Sixtieth Anniversary of our Independence this year, it is a proud moment for us to recall that democracy has opened up new vistas of opportunities, enabling us to achieve new milestones in our national life and in bolstering democracy across the community and the world at large.

I would like to heartily felicitate the CPA for its commitment to the cause of the Small Countries in the Commonwealth. In this context, I may add here that in India too, we have both big States and very small States, and we are fully aware of the specific issues of concern of the smaller States of the Union. At the global level also, we are deeply committed to preserve the interests of small countries within the framework of sovereign equality of all States, including in the conduct of international relations.

The Conference of Parliamentarians of Small Countries, over the years, has symbolized the collective wisdom and genius of the leaders of these

* At the Opening Ceremony of the Conference of Small Countries during the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, New Delhi (23 September 2007).

countries to share their views and ideas on issues of common concern. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which took the lead twenty-six years back to focus on the specific concerns of these countries, deserves appreciation for its initiative to provide an effective platform to them to ventilate their problems and share their experiences. In the past, the Conference has enabled them to discuss their problems fruitfully within the framework of an international forum.

The Conference is going to discuss vital subjects concerning parliamentary initiatives on 'Managing the Effects of Globalisation on Small Countries'; 'Collaborative versus Adversarial Systems of Government'; 'Regulating Immigration and Human Trafficking'; and 'Protecting the Environment to ensure Sustainable Development'. I am sure that the Delegates will bring their rich and long experience and expertise to bear on the quality of deliberations

We all are aware that small countries face several unique concerns different from other countries. Many of them are economically vulnerable and their productive activities have a high sensitivity to global economic fluctuations. They also suffer from developmental hurdles such as remoteness, being land-locked or littoral, dependence on limited number of primary products for export and inadequate opportunities for mobilizing resources.

In an era when we are getting interconnected with the rest of the world more than ever before, the nature and scope of the impact of global economic and political events on small countries are also undergoing a fundamental change. In this context, we must acknowledge the fact that the process of globalisation poses a complex mix of challenges and opportunities to these countries. As you all will agree, financial susceptibility constrains their competitiveness and ability to participate effectively in global economic activities while the process of globalisation tends to increase the risk of their getting pushed to the periphery.

It is high time that we impressed upon the international community to address the challenges of sustainable development that these countries are confronted with. The various processes of international trade should have sufficient space to accommodate their specific requirements and the international institutions, including institutions like the WTO, should pay attention to their peculiar economic problems. Some of the areas where we need to pay immediate attention are enhanced admittance to world markets, more favourable financing arrangements, rationalization of debt servicing, and preferential conditions for trade.

Besides these economic measures, we would exchange our varied experiences to envisage and implement situation-specific programmes that could reduce environmental risks such as soaring pollution, acute shortage of

fresh water, sewage disposal, depleted marine resources, etc. In the same way, appropriate steps should be taken for strengthening effective early warning systems against natural disasters and evolving viable financing mechanisms for disaster management, and post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation. We also need to address the issue of energy vulnerability of these small countries. All efforts must be made to promote their access to energy efficient and renewable technologies that are both within their means and adaptable to their specific requirements, so as to protect their environment and ensure sustainable development.

I am firmly of the view that in the interest of the people of small countries, it is imperative that a spirit of harmony and mutual cooperation prevails among various constituents of their political systems so as to enhance political stability. An atmosphere of instability, political or otherwise, will affect their prospects of development adversely. Collaborative politics, rather than adversarial politics, should prevail if the specific needs and requirements of small countries have to be effectively tackled. In this background, it is all the more appropriate that the political parties and various democratic institutions in these countries evolve an ethos of mutual respect so that the common goal of nation building could be accomplished.

Similarly, sincere efforts need to be made to address the problem of immigration and human trafficking. We all know that such problems are likely to compound the risks of socio-cultural instability, besides posing a grave political crisis before them. All efforts should, therefore, be made to coordinate the endeavours of various law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations, and countries of the Commonwealth into a cooperative force to support domestic and international actions against illegal immigration and human trafficking.

The imperative of parliamentary initiatives in getting the desired results in these areas can hardly be over emphasized. Periodic exchanges of views among parliamentarians from the smaller countries provide channels of interaction which also work as a forum for closer scrutiny of various political, social and cultural issues that they are facing today. As such, we must facilitate concerted action to channelize the grassroots experience and areas of knowledge for parliamentarians to deal with the problems facing small countries. I am sure we will have productive deliberations in this Conference which will go a long way in evolving a coordinated response to the issues before small countries and their peoples.

I once again compliment the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association on focusing special attention through this Conference on the challenges and opportunities before the smaller countries of the Commonwealth.

Thank you.

INDIA AND THE CPA: DELIVERING DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

I rise to welcome, on behalf of the people and Parliament of India, all the distinguished Delegates and other dignitaries who are assembled here for the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. This is the fourth time India has had the honour of hosting the CPA Conference, the earlier occasions being in 1957, 1975 and 1991. We are indeed gratified that the Commonwealth parliamentary fraternity chose New Delhi as the venue for the 53rd Conference, after a gap of sixteen years. We are particularly pleased that Parliament of India is hosting this momentous event in the Sixtieth Year of our Independence.

I take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to the Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil, for being with us today to inaugurate the Conference. We are very proud that our country has the great privilege of having a distinguished Lady as its Head of State.

We are grateful to the Hon'ble Vice-President of India and Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, for gracing this inaugural function as well. We are sorry that, due to his indisposition, our Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, could not be present here and he has been good enough to send a message which will be read out here.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), ever since its inception in 1911, has been engaged in the laudable tasks of promoting democracy, good governance and sustainable development. It recognizes diversity in all its dimensions and encourages member countries to adopt and adapt policies, systems and practices to suit their specific requirements which, in turn, will strengthen the democratic framework. The Annual Conferences of the Association have emerged as a significant event in the CPA's endeavours in strengthening democracy in the member countries. This 53rd Conference in New Delhi is yet another milestone in the CPA's on-going efforts to bring Commonwealth parliamentarians together in their resolve to make democracy relevant for the people and in making the world safe for democracy.

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* At the inauguration of the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi (25 September 2007).

We take it as a solemn recognition of the vibrant democracy that we have nurtured and nourished in India that the Commonwealth community called upon us to host this prestigious Conference. Apart from our unwavering commitment to the parliamentary system of governance, given our wide diversity in terms of languages and dialects spoken, religions and faiths practised, and other diversities which we, as a nation, have encompassed in ourselves, it may not perhaps be wrong to say that India is a commonwealth of people within the Commonwealth of Nations. Our diversity is our heritage and our strength, and every Indian takes pride in its millennial civilization and cultural heritage.

As the distinguished Delegates will experience during their stay here, however brief that be, the 60-year young India is in the midst of happenings and remarkable changes, which are impacting and transforming the lives of millions of people, empowering them in a substantial way. Those changes of far-reaching significance are what every nation has to go through for providing a better life to its people. Our billion plus population, enthused by an unprecedented optimism, propelled by a knowledge-driven economy and buttressed by the conviction of being the largest working democracy in the world, is constantly endeavouring to fulfil its expected role in the comity of nations. In the process, parliamentary democracy has evolved as a way of life for our people. In this exciting onward march of democracy and sweeping socio-economic changes, it is our Parliament which has been our lodestar.

We, in India, acknowledge the fact that each one of us in the Commonwealth has to develop institutions and evolve policies that can promote democracy and development. Each country has to take into consideration its native realities and particular socio-cultural and historical factors while addressing their specific problems. As you all know, the Commonwealth countries are not similar in size, population, and level of development. It is indeed laudable that the CPA has been seriously and purposefully devoting itself to address the issues concerning the women and those related to the small countries.

Today, there is a growing realization that there is no better alternative to democracy for promoting good governance and for emancipating and empowering people. The primacy of Parliament as the ultimate embodiment of people's will as also its efficacy in ensuring accountability to the people at all times have also been reiterated in no uncertain terms.

Distinguished Delegates, lack of comprehensive development is a major issue, posing a grave threat to many democratic countries including many in the Commonwealth. As the elected representatives of a third of the world's population, we, the parliamentarians of the Commonwealth, must put our resources and experiences together to consider and suggest the methods to

bring about further development that will sustain and take care of every segment of society. I am sure this Conference, with the main theme of 'Delivering Democracy and Sustainable Development' and the Workshops on related themes will give the Distinguished Delegates ample opportunities to discuss these issues in-depth.

As people's representatives, we will have to be accountable at all times to those from whom we derive our position and power. The people have a right to know what transpires in Parliament and how their representatives articulate their concerns and grievances in our Legislative Chambers. As such, in a democracy, the legislators must always remain accountable to the people and conform to the highest ethical standards. We look forward to informed discussions in the Host Branch Plenary on the subject 'Right to Recall as a Strategy for Enforcing Greater Accountability of Parliaments to the People'.

Today, democracy goes beyond its traditional moorings to evolve and adapt to the needs of the time, and the specific requirements of nations, big and small. The benchmarks of yesterday may need to be revised in context, and new goals and targets set, to make democracy more relevant to the people. I am sure that this 53rd Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association will be a significant landmark in our unceasing effort of delivering democracy and ensuring sustainable development.

With these words, I once again extend a very warm and hearty welcome to all of you.

Thank you.

CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY: ROLE OF COMMONWEALTH*

We now come to the end of the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. During the last few days, we have had occasions to meet each other, make new friends, and also had meaningful discussions, both in the Plenary Sessions and Workshops, on various issues of topical concern, with a view to strengthening democracy and making it more relevant and meaningful to the people. Apart from the main Conference, we have also had two days of Small Countries' Conference and a separate Conference of the Women Parliamentarians. Together, these Conferences looked into and discussed the varied dimensions of parliamentary democracy and sustainable development.

I am indeed happy that we have been able to achieve a consensus on a host of issues after such extensive discussions. I am extremely grateful to all the distinguished Delegates and others attending the Conference for your kind help and cooperation for the smooth conduct of this Conference.

Distinguished Delegates, it has undoubtedly been an educative experience for all of us to come together in this Conference to discuss and deliberate on several topical issues and share and benefit from one another's experiences. As the Conference concludes, on behalf of all the Delegates and on my own behalf, I take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil, who graciously acceded to our request to inaugurate the Conference. I would also like to thank the Hon'ble Vice-President of India, Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, for inaugurating the Small Countries' Conference. We are grateful to Her Majesty the Queen and the Patron of CPA and the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, for their Messages.

I am profoundly grateful to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, and his esteemed colleagues in the Council of Ministers, for extending all assistance in the successful organisation of the Conference.

I would also like to make a specific reference to the contribution of the Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development,

* At the Closing Ceremony of the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, New Delhi (28 September 2007).

Smt. Renuka Chowdhury, who is also the President of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians in making this Conference a great success. The Ministry of Communications, Department of Posts, deserves special appreciation for bringing out a Commemorative Stamp to mark the Conference. I also heartily thank the various Ministries and Departments of the Government of India, in particular, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs. I should mention, in particular, the cooperation and help we received from the Central Public Works Department, for putting up the wonderful Dining Halls and their efficient contribution, the Indian Tourism Development Corporation, particularly the Staff and Management of Hotel Ashok, the Horticulture Department for the eye-catching floral arrangements they have made everywhere; the Government of Delhi and the Delhi Police.

I also thank all the dignitaries, including the Leader of the Opposition, Shri L.K. Advaniji, who graciously hosted lunches and dinners for our esteemed Delegates and guests. I also thank the Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Shri K. Rahman Khanji and the Hon'ble Deputy Speaker, Lok Sabha, Charnjit Singh Atwalji, for their co-operation at every stage in organizing the Conference. I also express our thanks to the Hon'ble Chairman of the CPA Executive Committee, Shri Hashim Abdul Halim, and other members of the Executive Committee, for their valuable advice and co-operation for the successful conduct of the Conference. The State Branches of the India Region have also been a source of constant support all through.

The CPA Secretariat has extended full co-operation and help in ensuring the smooth conduct of the Conference. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. William F. Shija, Secretary-General, CPA, for his tireless efforts in ensuring the success of the Conference. I also thank Mr. Don McKinnon, the Secretary-General of Commonwealth, for addressing the Delegates.

I will be failing in my duty, if I do not acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the Officers and staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat under the able and dynamic leadership of Shri. P.D.T. Achary, the Secretary General, all along the planning and organization of this Conference. I also thank the acting Secretary-General of Rajya Sabha, Shri N.C. Joshi and his officers in the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, for their valuable support and cooperation.

I take this opportunity to heartily thank the media, both print and electronic, for taking an active interest and giving wide coverage for the varied activities of the Conference. A special word of thanks is due to the brilliant artists who gave us all an opportunity to experience the grandeur of India's rich cultural heritage. Each one of them was at his or her best. A special thanks to the Legends of India which coordinated the cultural evenings for us.

Before I conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to heartily welcome the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Malaysia, Hon'ble Tan Sri Dato' Seri Di Raja Ramli Ngah Talib, as the new President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association who will be hosting the next CPA Annual Conference. As Vice-President of the New Delhi Conference, he was always forthcoming with his support and cooperation. I wish him and the Malaysian Parliament the very best and I am sure that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association will move forward under his dynamic and inspiring leadership and guidance.

Distinguished Delegates, tomorrow, many of you will be visiting Agra. It will be a memorable full-day tour to visit the monument of eternal love, the Taj Mahal, and the historic fort at Fatehpur Sikri. I am sure, our esteemed Delegates and guests will find it to be an enjoyable experience. I would also like to thank the Presiding Officers of the Uttar Pradesh State Legislature for hosting the Delegates in Agra. The Ministry of Railways, owe a special word of thanks from us for facilitating this visit.

Excellencies and Friends, more than anything else, our gratitude is to you all whose cooperation at every stage and enthusiastic participation throughout the Conference, is what has made all our efforts a highly rewarding experience for us at the host Secretariat. In organizing a Conference of this magnitude, it will be unrealistic to claim perfection. It has, however, been our constant endeavour to make your brief stay in New Delhi a pleasant experience and this Conference a success. Before I conclude, I would crave for your indulgence for the shortcomings, if any, on our part.

I now conclude on a note of satisfaction and with the hope that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Commonwealth parliamentarians will work with more intent and interest in the coming years in delivering democracy and sustainable development and setting high benchmarks for democratic Legislatures so as to ensure that democracy delivers as also remains relevant to the people at all times.

Thank you.

INDIA AND CUBA: TIME-TESTED FRIENDSHIP*

I am extremely pleased to be here with you at the Centre of Studies on Asia and Oceania (CEAO). Earlier today, I was at the House of Asia at a function where its prestigious Library was named after Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. And now, speaking at this eminent institution, I am reminded of the many links that Cuba has established with the nations and peoples of Asia. All these speak highly of how much the people and the Government of Cuba values cultural diversity, and their desire to facilitate cultural exchanges with diverse peoples and cultures across the world, especially in Asia. The CEAO is a testimony to those noble ideals.

I understand that the Centre of Studies on Asia and Oceania was set up with the purpose of conducting academic research on political, economic, social and historical processes in the countries of Asia and the Oceania. The objectives of the CEAO like facilitating in-depth study of changes taking place in our regions, promoting scientific research at national and international levels and disseminating information about developments in the Asia-Oceania regions amongst academics and specialists are indeed commendable, considering the complementarities and commonalities that we have and that we share. The CEAO also deserves much praise for enabling the flow of information and knowledge between Cuba and the regions of Asia and the Pacific, educating the Cuban people about Asia and the Oceania and disseminating knowledge about Cuba in the countries of the Asia-Oceania regions.

Since its establishment in November 1985, the Centre has emerged as a prestigious institution of academic excellence. This is truly reflected in the fact that today the CEAO is a distinguished member of the reputed Association of Afro-Asian and Latin American Studies and the Latin American Council of Social Sciences. Its academic profile speaks volumes of the excellent work it has done over the last two decades and more and the reputation it has earned for itself through its varied activities. We deeply appreciate this laudable Cuban initiative and the endeavours of eminent personalities associated with it, especially its Director, Mr. Juan Carretero Ibanez, in facilitating and nurturing this institution. Incidentally, Mr. Juan Ibanez was Cuba's Ambassador to India, and we cherish the connections we have with this institution through him.

* At the Centre of Studies on Asia and Oceania, Havana, Cuba (10 January 2008).

I have learned that the CEAO recently hosted an International Symposium on Asia-Pacific Studies, covering themes on the current situation in major Asian economies, including India, Japan, China, Vietnam and Malaysia, and the political and security trends in the region. I heartily congratulate you on the successful conclusion of the Symposium. I firmly believe that such initiatives will foster better understanding of the situations obtaining in our respective regions, and give us diverse perspectives and a proper insight on developing the right approach to international relations, most importantly for the objective of global peace and security.

Today is our sixth and the concluding day in this beautiful Island country that has fascinated every member of my Delegation in many ways. Despite various odds, Cuba has made remarkable progress in several areas that can be the envy of many developed countries. With a balanced sex ratio, low infant mortality, low fertility, high life expectancy, an efficiently executed National Health System and almost cent-per cent literacy, Cuba can legitimately take pride in its ability to deliver. It is indeed heartening to learn that the education sector was earmarked 16.4 per cent of the total government expenditure in the year 2002. A nation that puts such high premium on its children's education and health care can only move forward towards progress and prosperity and Cuba has proved this clearly.

Back home, the present-day India is in the midst of remarkable changes, changes that can no longer be ignored. Our country is undergoing a rapid and increasingly all-encompassing process of socio-economic transformation. We are of the view that growth in a liberalizing and globalizing economy must lead to a better quality of life for all, including the poor and the dispossessed. In fact, growth has to have a human face and we are taking ample care to ensure that growth and development are inclusive, equitable and just. We are looking at economic reforms as something that has the potential to unlock the fetters to growth and help people to improve their standards of living. We are engaged in the challenging task of building an India where our people, specially those belonging to the vulnerable sections, will be entitled to earn a decent livelihood with access to education and quality healthcare, and indeed will be entitled to and actually have the freedom to live in dignity. With a billion-strong people developing at its current pace, we are today one of the fastest growing economies in the world and we want our people to be stakeholders and not helpless observers. This task may not be easy and we are looking at every angle with a view to giving maximum benefit to our people. India and Cuba can learn from each other's experience and there is a wide scope for co-operation in areas like sustainable development, climate change, good governance, etc.

We are really pleased with the Cuban initiatives in setting up various channels of interaction between Asia and Oceania. Our countries are developing fast, and the pulls and pressures of the emerging global order are being felt by each one of us. We have been striving hard to provide better standards of life to our peoples, and we have succeeded substantially in those efforts. Nonetheless, we all agree that this has to be a relentless pursuit in which we can share experiences and expertise. The countries of Asia and Oceania also have to cope with many other developmental problems. In addition, we also have to confront the emerging challenges of the global political, economic and security order. All these warrant that we interact regularly at the political and academic levels so as to co-ordinate our efforts in securing a just, humane and peaceful world order. Such interactions at different levels will also pave the way for greater people-to-people contacts which will help to further strengthen the bonds of friendship that exist between our countries.

In this context, I would stress that during the current visit of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation to Cuba, we have had fruitful discussions on various bilateral and global issues with the Cuban leadership. I am sure this visit will contribute much to the further strengthening of our time-tested friendship. We are extremely grateful to the people and the Government of Cuba for their hospitality and the warm welcome extended to us during our visit. The interactions with eminent scholars and intellectuals here at the prestigious Centre of Studies on Asia and Oceania will also linger long in our memories.

Thank you.

INDIA AND RUSSIA: AN EVERLASTING FRIENDSHIP*

It is indeed a great pleasure and an honour for me to have been invited to inaugurate the Photo Exhibition on the History of the Russian Parliamentary System. I take this opportunity to convey my greetings and felicitations to the Russian people on the anniversary of the establishment of the Russian Parliament, Duma. It is a pleasant coincidence that we are having this Exhibition at a time when the largest democracy is engaged in the biggest electoral exercise anywhere in the world to elect the new Lok Sabha, the House of the people.

At a time when India-Russia friendship is poised to scale greater heights, the holding of the Exhibition in India on the Russian Parliamentary System is indeed very appropriate. India and Russia have shared a warm and cordial relationship and have been the bulwark of peace, progress and prosperity across the world. Our relationship spans a wide array of activities, including political, economic and cultural. During the past few years, there has been continuous engagement between the two countries at various levels, particularly at the people's level, and today's event is yet another eloquent testimony of that sprit of warmth and amity.

Although major events in recent years have changed the trajectory of world politics and the equations between and among countries, India-Russia relations have not only withstood the test of time but have also grown from strength to strength. The relations between the two countries have been redefined taking into account new realities and without losing the basic tenets and fundamentals that have sustained them all these years.

The visits of H.E. Mr. Vladimir Putin to India, including that of 2007 when he was the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations, speak volumes of the importance that we attach to our friendship. We celebrated the Year of Russia in India in 2008 and this year is being celebrated as the Year of India in Russia. We were greatly privileged to receive Russian President H.E. Mr. Dmitry Medvedev who visited India in December 2008 and to renew the long tradition of friendship and cooperation between our two countries and

* At the function organised by the Unity International Foundation and the Russian Centre of Science and Culture to inaugurate a Photo Exhibition on *The History of Russian Parliamentary System* and to give away the Unity Award posthumously to Late Chaudhury Ranbir Singh, New Delhi (29 April 2009).

peoples. No words perhaps can more succinctly describe India-Russia friendship than those of H.E. Mr. Vladimir Putin when he addressed the members of Parliament in the historic Central Hall on 4 October 2000. What he spoke merits mention here:

> "India is a great country. It is our long-term partner and ally. Our fruitful relations are devoid of alien and egoistic tasks, and are mutually beneficial. Between the peoples of Russia and India, there has never been any hostility, there has never been a voice of conflict. Russia and India are ancient civilizations but at the same time they are living and developing democracies. In the new century, we are ready to strengthen our relations. We are maintaining the most valuable traditions of friendship and profound sympathy and respect for each other."

Our two countries have been collaborating continuously in diverse fields, including trade and commerce, science and technology, defence, etc. There has also been a long cultural and literary linkage between India and Russia. As all of you know, our greatest poet the Nobel laureate, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had visited Russia in 1930 and was deeply impressed to see the empathy of the rural folks for their less privileged brethren. One finds Tagore's deep appreciation and feelings for Russia in his Letters from Russia, written originally in Bengali. Prof. Amartya Sen, himself a Nobel laureate, mentions in one of his scholarly articles that there is a great resonance in the works of Tagore with those of Russian literary giants like Tolstoy or Gorky, in spite of differences in settings and nuances.

India and Russia might have adopted two different political systems, but there is a strong convergence of our ultimate goals and objectives, and Parliament, as the fulcrum of that inclusive edifice, stands supreme, articulating the hopes and aspirations of our peoples. The importance of the Exhibition, which I have the pleasure and the privilege to inaugurate today, can hardly be over-emphasized, in the context of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-denominational societies that both the countries have. It depicts the evolution, the growth and the significance of the parliamentary polity very graphically and illustratively. Such Exhibitions have their own importance for they go a long way in creating awareness of the efficacy of parliamentary institutions and structures in strengthening democracy and in enabling social harmony, unity and integrity in a multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic society and polity, particularly among the younger generations. Political apathy and indifference to electoral processes, especially among the youth, do not augur well for the health of democracy. The younger generations should be inspired to know more about their democratic and parliamentary heritage and then only can they internalise the cherished values

of democracy. I strongly feel that such Exhibitions are an imperative concomitant in inculcating appreciation for parliamentary values. I, in my own humble ways, have tried to develop the Parliament Museum in the Parliament Complex to showcase India's rich democratic heritage and our pulsating democracy. I am happy that the Parliament Museum has been very popular and is visited by a large number of students and dignitaries from India and abroad.

One must acknowledge that the Unity International Foundation, ever since its inception in 1964, has been making valuable contributions, for the promotion of peace and harmony at people-to-people level between India and other countries. In recent years, people-to-people contact, as part of what is called 'Track II Diplomacy', has assumed great significance, as it facilitates better understanding and help in creating a climate of confidence between the people and the Governments. Such contacts can be promoted through exchange of students, teachers, academics, media persons, cultural troupes, sports persons, professionals and others. The parliamentarians can also contribute a great deal towards better understanding and cooperation between countries. It is a matter of great satisfaction for us that we have regular exchanges at the parliamentary level between our two countries. I am happy to share with you that in our Parliament we have a India-Russia Friendship group which is contributing towards greater friendship between the two countries.

Friendly relations among different countries will undoubtedly promote peace and better understanding among their people. There have been enough strife, stress and strain in the world, resulting in intense suffering of the innocent people; it is only through understanding and amity that we can secure permanent peace. These are ideals India and Russia share in ample measure.

I am happy to know that the Unity International Foundation have conferred its prestigious award on eminent persons such as the Presidents of Argentina, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan and to the Governor-General of Mauritius and to the late Swedish Premier Olaf Palme, in recognition of their contributions to peace and development.

It is extremely thoughtful on the part of the organizers to have chosen the occasion to give away the Unity Award posthumously to late Chaudhury Ranbir Singh. Chaudhury Ranbir Singhji was a respected freedom fighter and a renowned parliamentarian who believed that the institution of Parliament is the bedrock of the unity and integrity of the country, especially one like India, which is verily a multicultural society. Late respected Ranbir Singhji espoused the values of democracy, unity and integrity, in his long and distinguished public life, which has also been the very motto of the Unity

International Foundation. I congratulate the Foundation that by this decision, it has added lustre to the prestigious Unity Award.

Much can be said about the legendary leader Chaudhury Ranbir Singh, who was one of the last surviving members of India's Constituent Assembly, which was mandated to draft the Constitution of the Indian Republic. Chaudhury Ranbir Singh, besides being a distinguished member of the Constituent Assembly, was an eminent freedom fighter, a member of the Provisional Parliament, and later a member of the Punjab and Haryana Legislative Assemblies, and a member of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, a distinction, which I do not think, anybody else possessed.

The public life of Chaudhury Ranbir Singh goes back to the days of our freedom struggle. Even as a student, the call of the freedom struggle stirred him and drew him to the national cause. Under the inspiring leadership of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, he actively took part in the freedom struggle and was arrested eight times and was jailed for a considerable period. He was a champion of the cause of the poor and the under-privileged, particularly the peasants and farmers. He was the founder General-Secretary of the Bharat Krishak Samaj and the All-India Backward Classes Federation. As a member of the two Houses of Parliament and the Legislative Assemblies of Haryana and Punjab, and even outside Parliament, he very zealously articulated the interests and concerns of the farmers and agriculturists. Chaudhury Ranbir Singh was always rooted to the village. In fact, while participating in a debate in the Constituent Assembly on 6 November 1948, he very candidly said, "I am a villager, born and bred in a farmer's house. Naturally I have imbibed its culture".

Late Chaudhury Ranbir Singh was also a staunch votary of secularism and an inclusive polity. He firmly believed that the ultimate goal of a democratic polity was to establish an inclusive social order. He was a continuing link of the present generation of leadership with the earlier generation belonging to that of the freedom struggle and the period immediately succeeding that generation. At a time when the memories of the freedom struggle are slowly fading away, the ideas and ideals of Chaudhury Ranbir Singh have more relevance today than ever before. His emphasis on unity and integrity of our secular fabric have a profound significance, especially today when divisive and sectarian elements are threatening the nation. That being so, it is eminently appropriate that the Unity Award is being posthumously conferred on Late Chaudhury Ranbir Singh. I am happy that his worthy son is present here to receive the award.

Friends, I must say that I am overwhelmed and humbled at the gesture of the Unity International Foundation to felicitate me for my humble services

to the cause of parliamentary democracy. I am indeed touched by the generous sentiment and I take this opportunity to reiterate that there is no substitute for democracy and that it is our collective responsibility to uphold it further. To strengthen democracy, we have to build institutions and nourish them and also inculcate democratic values and total commitment to their ethical content. More importantly, we have to involve the youth in the democratic process and restore the trust of the people in the efficacy of parliamentary democracy. That has been my humble endeavour all through my political life. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for bestowing this undeserved honour on me. I hope that the ideas and ideals of stalwarts like Late Chaudhury Ranbir Singh will continue to inspire us in our endeavour to strengthen democracy. I also fervently hope and trust that India-Russia friendship will be further strengthened in the years to come for the peace and prosperity of the people at large, and also for fostering democracy across the world.

With these words, I have immense pleasure in inaugurating this Photo Exhibition on the History of the Russian Parliamentary System.

Thank you.

IV
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

ROLE OF YOUTH IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

I deem it a great honour to have been given the opportunity to be amidst you at this august gathering in this historic city of Amritsar. On this occasion, I am reminded of the supreme sacrifice that the leaders and people of Punjab made for the cause of our freedom. The courage and valour that the people of Punjab had shown and the sacrifice they had made will always be remembered by the country. No one can forget the role and contribution of Lala Lajpat Rai, popularly known as the 'Lion of Punjab', along with that of Bal Gangadhar Tilak of Maharashtra and Bipin Chandra Pal of Bengal, in the formative period of our epic freedom struggle. Similarly the supreme sacrifice of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev will always be remembered by the people with gratitude and reverence.

Not far from this beautiful campus is situated the famous Jallianwala Bagh, where hundreds of innocent people lost their lives on 13 April 1919 in the wake of the country-wide agitation against the draconian Rowlatt Act. Punjab was, in fact, in the forefront of the anti-Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919. The massacre of the innocent and peaceful people at Jallianwala Bagh provides the greatest saga of sacrifice and struggle during our freedom movement and the incident is etched in the annals of history. As an eminent Professor observed, 'no event within the living memory of Indian history has made so deep and painful an impression on the minds of the public in this country as the massacre of the innocent people on 13th April 1919'. The present generation should learn from the unity of purpose demonstrated by the people of diverse faiths, prior to those eventful days, and the grit and determination and the defiance shown by the freedom fighters subsequent thereto. The hundreds of dead and the injured at the Jallianwala Bagh included people of all castes and communities. On April 9, just four days before the massacre, on Ram Navami Day, Hindu and Muslim protestors had shared water from the same glass. It eloquently spoke of our secular traditions and the underlying unity that cuts across all our diversities. Jallianwala Bagh galvanized an entire generation and laid the foundation for Punjab's vigorous secular political traditions.

This great city had been actively involved with our struggle for freedom and occupies a special position in the heart of every Indian. The serene

* At the Annual Convocation of the Khalsa College, Amritsar (10 July 2004).

presence of the magnificent Golden Temple in the city reminds the people of the great role played by the Sikh Gurus in providing, amongst others, a place of pilgrimage. As a modern city, Amritsar occupies an important position, contributing immensely to the industrial development of the country through its ever growing small-scale industries and particularly, those of woollens and handicrafts. As an institution which has become an integral part of the city, Khalsa College, founded 113 years ago, has expanded at a remarkable pace over the years, and has rightly been recognized as one of the premier educational institutions of our country.

Over the years, the College has come a long way in realizing the dreams of its founding fathers that they cherished so dearly – the dream of spreading modern and progressive education based on science and technology, rooting out ignorance, illiteracy and injurious social evils, to be achieved through enlightened, progressive, secular and value oriented education in the fields of humanities, agriculture, science and technology, besides promoting the spread of Punjabi language in Gurumukhi script. It is indeed praiseworthy that the Khalsa College, with its excellent achievements, not only in the fields of education and sports but also in the field of applied sciences, has produced many towering personalities. Among them, were the famous litterateurs like Dr. Mulk Raj Anand and Dr. Bhisham Sahni, who have done their alma mater proud by their contributions. One of my most distinguished predecessors in Parliament, Dr. G.S. Dhillon was also one of the finest products of this College.

The contribution of this College in the field of sports is also noteworthy. It has produced star performers in sports and athletics throughout and the list includes national, international, Asian and Olympian sports persons of great merit and repute. Further, it has a rich tradition of sending many distinguished and decorated Generals like General Rajinder Singh Sparrow and Air Marshal Arjan Singh to the service of the nation.

I feel deeply beholden to the management of the College for inviting me to deliver the Convocation Address. May I thank you, Jaswinderji for giving me this opportunity. I wish to extend my heartiest felicitations to all my young friends who have earned laurels at the examinations. I convey my best wishes to all of you for every success in your future endeavours. Your achievements are the result of industry, patience and stern discipline that you have observed for years together. I sincerely wish that the hopes and aspirations of your college days are fulfilled in the years to come. Great opportunities and challenges are awaiting you. All of you are potential teachers, doctors, engineers, civil servants, or leaders of society. Whatever you may eventually become, and wherever you are, you should resolve to serve the society and the country at large with dedication and commitment, strengthening the people's unity and the country's secular traditions and shunning fundamentalism, communalism and all types of obscurantism.

The importance of value-based education can hardly be overemphasized. As we all know, India has one of the largest pool of human resources in the world and has carved out a niche for herself in the world map. The number of universities and institutions of higher learning have increased over the years.

While traditional disciplines and streams in both humanities and sciences such as philosophy, history, law, political science or physics and chemistry have always had their importance, the frontiers of knowledge are changing and expanding at a fast pace, offering us new challenges and opportunities. Now-a-days, information technology, biotechnology and genetic engineering are rightly much sought after courses and we must facilitate introduction of such streams in our university curriculum. The position that India has achieved in information technology in the world is remarkable by any reckoning. Indian software engineers have earned laurels the world over. Biotechnology plays a very important role in the development of agriculture and the universities and research institutes can play a very critical role in this regard.

While higher education and technical education are important, equally important and perhaps more important is elementary and primary education. We must address this with all seriousness. Access to education should be universal. We have to create physical conditions to realize the goals of universal elementary education. While speaking of the importance of education in our life, I am reminded of what Swami Vivekananda had said:

> 'The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of lion — is it worth the name? Real education is that which enables one to stand on his own legs'. Education in all its forms, whether for children, for adults or for communities, is a key factor in social transformation and development.

A truly educated man, whose understanding has been enlightened, is, bestowed with intellectual curiosity and the capacity to think clearly, which is called scientific temper. A student's education at the various stages of learning process, should inculcate in him the capacity to think for himself on problems, not only of his own but also of the society at large.

It should always be our endeavour to rise above narrow bigotry and petty objectives. National unity and national interest should inevitably and forever prevail over and above other primordial loyalties and attachments. There is a strong historical and cultural thread, which binds us together, regardless of religion, language or caste. As you go out of the portals of your College, you have a crucial role to play in the overall development of our

nation. Our country faces gigantic problems. But you have exciting opportunities and prospects. You can be part of the great and challenging task of uplifting millions of our people from poverty, disease, ignorance, malnutrition and building a strong and progressive India and also contributing to peace and stability.

Though our country has immense possibilities and potential, its natural development cannot take place until its political and administrative structure can be cleansed and the country can be governed with commitment to the ideals and objectives, which are enshrined in the Preamble and Parts III and IV of our Constitution.

After more than fifty-five years of freedom from colonial rule, we are still unable to meet the basic needs of about four hundred million people, who live below the poverty line, and who do not have adequate food, clothing, shelter, health-care and education. In fact the number of poor people in the country today is larger than the population of India at the time of Independence and these are our countrymen whose interest should have priority and primacy.

How do we secure to the people of this country, their entitlements, and the wherewithals so that they can have a civilized existence and their needs can be adequately met? Unless the nation as a whole is committed to the removal of the scourge of poverty, illiteracy, backwardness and discrimination between people and people on the basis of religion, caste and community, the future will be uncertain, if not bleak and in this respect, the student community and those who have had the benefit of receiving higher education, can play a stellar role.

Founding Fathers of our Constitution had after long deliberations decided upon parliamentary democracy as the system of polity as most suited for us. We have to solve the country's problems through the system of governance as laid down in our Constitution. Our citizens have valuable Fundamental Rights which are basic rights and the Constitution also lays down what would be the Directive Principles for the governance of the country. Our constitutional set-up is based on the accountability of the Council of Ministers to the people's representatives which, to my mind, is best suited to our country.

In the case of the Centre, the responsibility of the Council of Ministers is to the House of the People and in the States, to the respective Assemblies. But, ultimately, the responsibility is to the people of the country, who, through their elected representatives, enforce the responsibility. This is the basic postulate of the parliamentary democracy. With a view to enforcing this responsibility, what is essential is that the Parliament should function in a

disciplined and organized manner, as a living institution. What is needed is that the members must see that the Parliament, which has to function according to the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business, is able to discuss and find solutions to the peoples problems. Unfortunately, there are occasions when due to interruptions, the proceedings of the House have been disturbed, which not only interferes with the due functioning of Parliament but also seriously affects its image, resulting in the loss of its credibility and effectiveness as the most important public forum in the country.

For parliamentary democracy to succeed, a Government, wedded to democracy, must welcome free and frank discussion in the House and should not be averse to criticism. Further, specially when events of great public importance take place, it should be ready to invite Parliament's views on the same, which will give an idea of the opinion of the political spectrum. Equally, the Opposition should be alert, vigilant and constructive and help in the proper functioning of the Parliament, to which the people look up with great hope and expectations.

In view of the complexities of the problems facing the country and the people, to my mind, there is no alternative to parliamentary democracy with adult franchise and a federal set-up. To provide for the development of different States and regions, we have to strengthen our federal structure and remove the shortcomings. If the Centre and the States can function without interference by each other in their specified areas, we shall be strengthening the basic unity and integrity of the country. Decentralisation of administration up to the grass roots level has to be effectively implemented, the rights of the people have to be assured and the minimum necessities of the people will have to be ensured. India lives in village as it is said and development of the rural areas, particularly of the rural economy should have the highest priority, which cannot be achieved without implementation of land reforms. The experience of some States, which have faithfully implemented land reforms legislations, should inspire others to do so. The development of small scale and rural industries will have to be given priority to accelerate growth of the economy. Research in Science and technology will have to be encouraged. Steps have to be taken for the empowerment of women and their active participation in the political and administrative affairs to make the development process more transparent and people-oriented. With the participation of the workers in the management of industries and by providing living wages to them, there will be greater involvement of the workers, which will accelerate the process of development and strengthen the industrial base of the country. We have also to seriously ponder whether globalization and liberalization, *per se* and jobless growth will be suited to our country's needs.

The country's strength lies in its unity in diversity. Secularism cannot be a mere jargon or paper provision of the Constitution. We must be cautious to see that our educational system as well as our polity remain free of divisive trends of fundamentalism and obscurantism as well as anti-secular trends.

Strengthening the basic foundation of parliamentary democracy in our country by cleansing the body politic of its aberrations and the weaknesses and the commitment to the objectives of our Constitution, providing to the vulnerable sections of the society their entitlement, strict adherence to secularism and transparency in governance, adoption of pro-people economic and agrarian policies, universalisation of education and empowerment of women will help in the fulfilment of the goals and objectives for which our freedom fighters and leaders toiled and even gave up their lives and will turn our country into a most vibrant and developed one.

My young friends, I convey my greetings and very best wishes to you for success in all your future activities. It behoves all of us to always think of the urges and aspirations, the demands and dreams of the common people of our country. To fulfil them, we need people with dedication, sincerity and probity who will strive for the development of the country, with justice and opportunities equally for all and I have no doubt that you have got all the qualities and will be worthy citizens of this great country. Once again, I wish to convey my sincere gratitude to the Principal and the management of the College for giving me this opportunity of being with you and I hope I have not taxed your patience too much.

Thank you.

SAFEGUARDING HUMAN RIGHTS*

I am grateful to the All India Lawyers' Union, Andhra Pradesh State Committee, for giving me this opportunity to associate myself with this Seminar on a subject of importance to democracy and human life.

Human rights is perhaps one of the most talked about themes today, both nationally and internationally. It is also used and abused by many for different reasons, sometimes out of genuine concern for human dignity and at times, even as a tool for coercion and blackmail by some societies against the other. Today, living as we are in an increasingly informed and well-connected world, a balanced understanding of the rights and duties among the citizens will be useful both for the Government and the people.

I am aware that the All India Lawyers' Union has a long history of representing the marginalised, and the vulnerable people, besides extending free legal aid to the needy and I wish to compliment them for the pro-people role they are playing.

Friends, human rights are in a way synonymous with a life of dignity and freedom. The core concept of human rights, is to ensure the dignity, which includes the right to life as well as the right to work, of every person as a human being, regardless of colour, race, religion, nationality, sex, language or any other factor. They are inalienable, indivisible, inter-dependent and inter-related. That being so, no body should be allowed to infringe on the rights of others and those whose rights are abused or denied should be given the protection including the opportunity to exercise the rights.

The story of the evolution of human rights, from the Magna Carta to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), has in many ways been also the story of the reaffirmation of democracy as the most preferred and acceptable system of Government across the world. The idea of human rights and democracy emerged stronger after the Second World War. Following its horrifying experience and devastation, people across the world wanted to ensure that never again should anyone be unjustly denied life, freedom, food, shelter and nationality. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights together with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and

* At the inauguration of the Seminar organized by the All India Lawyers' Union, Hyderabad (3 October 2004).

the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights constitute the core of universally recognized rights of men and women.

Human rights are not the gift or bounty of any political sovereign but are the rights inherent in human beings. The purpose of any organized society is to recognise them, to regulate them for their better enjoyment and to provide for their enforcement. Rule of Law underlined by respect for human rights is the distinct characteristic of democratic societies. Rule of Law presupposes the existence of effective, transparent and accountable governance at all levels, particularly at the levels of the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. Democracy cannot survive without respecting human rights and human rights can truly be guaranteed and nurtured only in a democratic society. Democracy and human rights are thus inter-dependent and inter-related.

In this context, I would like to draw your attention to the instances of large scale violation of the human rights of the people of Iraq, indulged in by the occupying powers there. No country, no matter how big it is, should appropriate to itself the right to decide the destiny of the people of another sovereign country. What is happening in Iraq cannot be justified by any recognized set of laws of mankind.

The observance, promotion and protection of human rights in a country like ours with its ethnic, religious, linguistic and economic diversity, low literacy levels and developmental problems, has indeed been a challenging task. The basic values of freedom, equality and rights which every citizen of our country is entitled are summarized in the Preamble to our Constitution itself as also in its Chapters III and IV.

The Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution are, in a sense, the civil and political rights of our people. We also have the Directive Principles of State Policy which are fundamental in the governance of the country to realise the economic, social and cultural rights of the people. Dignity of the individual is a core value, of our Constitution and the emphasis on human rights should remain a fundamental feature of our governance.

Our Parliament which represents the supreme and sovereign will of the people has created several institutional mechanisms to safeguard the interests of the vulnerable sections of our society. Our Parliament and the State Legislatures have also translated the human rights listed in the Constitution into binding legal norms by enacting several socio-economic measures, particularly targeting the welfare of women, children and the economically and socially vulnerable sections of our population.

However, in spite of such initiatives, we are still far away from the objective of stabilising an equitable socio-economic order, creating conditions for the empowerment of women and for the healthy development of our children. The caste-based social stratification in itself is a violation of the notion of equitable social order and so is the State's approach to civil rights on the basis of religion, language, etc. Considering that we have the largest population of children in the world, our commitment to their cause should go further deep. It is distressing to note that our children are suffering from the scourges of poverty, hunger, homelessness, malnutrition and illiteracy. It is also very disheartening when we come across instances of child labour, child abuse, and child trafficking.

A large number of incident of human rights abuses take place across the country even today. Every such incident is a black spot on our institutions of governance and on our civil society. These are challenges before all of us, be it parliamentarians, decision-makers, or lawyers. Together we have to ensure the protection of human rights of our people, particularly of the vulnerable and the deprived sections of our population.

In this context, the Legislature which has the inherent responsibility to articulate the concerns of the society at large and exercises a decisive influence on the policies and laws affecting human rights, has a special role to play. It should be able to give a new vision and fresh concepts for strengthening and consolidating human rights institutions. The Legislatures have to become more proactive in ensuring respect for human rights and in monitoring the implementation of decisions related to human rights mechanisms.

We cannot rest content with mere making of laws for addressing social issues. They have to be implemented with even greater commitment. As it is said, 'a law-abiding society is possible only when the injunctions emanating from the statutes are matched by the conviction among the people of the need for such measures'. Legislators have to set examples both in respecting the rights of others as also in scrupulously subscribing to the concept of Rule of Law. Educating people about human rights and making them aware of the work of the various human rights institutions by themselves will go a long way in protecting human rights.

It is also important to create an environment conducive for the enjoyment of human rights by all citizens in all parts of the country in equal measure. Human rights is as much a social and economic concept as is an important political concept. For the rights and freedoms of the people in a democracy to have real value, it is necessary that they possess the capacity to exercise them. It is important for democracy to have an effective social dimension if it is to sustain popular support. This was reiterated time and again by our

Founding Fathers while laying the institutional foundations of our Republic. Addressing the Constituent Assembly in 1949, Dr. Ambedkar had stated:

> We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy.... We must begin by acknowledging the fact that there is complete absence of two things in Indian society ... . On the social plane, we have in India a society based on the principle of graded inequality, which means elevation for some and degradation for others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth as against many who live in abject poverty.

Dr. Ambedkar had, therefore, warned that if we continued to overlook this contradiction in our society, our political democracy would be in peril.

Removal of social and economic inequality remains the greatest challenge for our Government today and our legislators and political leadership have to ceaselessly strive to do so. Only when we achieve that can we claim to have given real meaning and content to the whole concept of human rights, in all its dimensions. The rights of the starving millions for a dignified existence should be recognized as the most fundamental of all human rights universally.

Our Legislatures need to take the initiatives for ensuring transparency, openness and accountability in the functioning of the Government. It is also for them to take the lead for sensitizing the public functionaries about the need to respect fundamental human rights in all their actions. Once the public functionaries at every level internalize the importance of the principle of accountability, the incidences of violation of human rights in our country will definitely come down. It is also important to provide teeth to the institutions created by our Legislatures, specifically to monitor incidences of violation of individual rights. No case of deliberate violation of citizen's rights, whether be caused by mass fury or by misguided individual action, should go unpunished. The deterrent value of punishment itself is an effective defence for human rights.

Yet another area on which both the legislators and those in the legal profession have to think together is about the ways and means to speed up our justice-delivery system. Delay in providing justice is also a violation of individual's rights. It undermines the credibility of our judicial system itself.

Friends, we, parliamentarians, and you, the lawyers, are the trustees of the faith of the common man in a democracy and in the concept of Rule of Law. Our obligations, our responsibilities, our commitments and our goals towards the people at large are the same. We have a joint responsibility to

respect, protect, promote and defend their rights and we should renew our endeavours to fulfil their expectations in collaboration with the civil society. This Seminar is going to deliberate on a subject which has a bearing on the life and freedoms of each and every individual. I am sure, we all will stand to benefit from the deliberations of this Seminar. I thank you all for your patient hearing. With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Seminar.

Thank you.

TAPPING RENEWABLE SOURCES OF ENERGY*

I am happy to be here today and to associate myself with this Seminar to deliberate on a subject of great importance to our country's development. Energy plays a crucial role in the development process of a country. Consumption of energy is an important indicator of its productivity and growth. The energy sector in our country does not present a very encouraging picture. The President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Azad described it as both 'depressing and gloomy' in his book, *India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium*. To quote him: 'In the 1950s, India and China had roughly the same installed power capacity. Now China has roughly three times more installed capacity than India! Further, China has been consistently adding a capacity of about 15,000 MW a year for several years now whereas our capacity is growing at a rate of 2,500 MW per year.... Our vision for the electric power sector will not be complete without a major emphasis on the new sources of energies, which are clean and renewable... .'

One area that did not receive the attention it deserves, in our planning process, in my opinion, is this sector. We have failed both in generating the required amount of power as also in its even distribution. Most part of our country are still not connected by our power distribution network. Some statistics about our power sector that I have come across, indeed present a depressing picture. India today ranks sixth in the world in terms of energy demand and it is expected to grow at a rate of 5.2 per cent during the 10th Five Year Plan. But this is not a demand that we cannot meet. If we focus on this area with commitment for the next ten years, we can effectively address the problems of this vital sector. First of all, we have to realize that the complete energy requirements of a vast country like India cannot be met by relying heavily on the conventional sources of energy. We have a huge untapped energy potential in the renewable energy sources also.

Our own conventional sources of energy being meagre, it is of utmost importance that we divert our attention and sufficient resources into the non-conventional areas like solar energy, wind energy, hydropower, geo-thermal power, tidal energy, bio-mass energy from urban and agricultural wastes, etc. If we are able to harness these sources of energy we can reduce our dependence

* At the Seminar on *Renewable Energy Technologies: Innovations and Market Penetration*, Kolkata (8 October 2004).

on conventional sources and ensure that our villages, and of course, our Capital and the big cities are not excluded, and will not have to go without power.

Studies have shown that if we can develop just 1 per cent of solar potential, we would be able to produce 20 times the energy derived from conventional sources. With our geographic vastness and climatic diversity — with six climate zones providing varying degrees of heat — if we are able to exploit the solar energy in a big way, we can ensure uninterrupted power supply to every corner of the country through this source alone. Similarly, India's wind energy potential is estimated to be between 30,000 and 50,000 MW and the potential from small and mini-micro hydel projects is 10,000 MW and from bio and agricultural waste is estimated to be between 17,000 and 60,000 MW.

There are many distinct advantages in all these alternative sources of energy. These sources are renewable unlike the conventional ones. It is available in plenty, in almost all parts of the country, to be harnessed throughout the year. It can be generated at the place where it is needed and hence requires no distribution grids or long transportation cables. Its recurring and operating expenses are almost negligible. And the biggest advantage for India, with its many cities fast earning the not too pleasing reputation of being the most polluted ones in the world, is that these are non-polluting sources as well.

Friends, the first prerequisite for bringing about any change is the yearning for change itself. In our country there is now a growing realization that if we are able to exploit even a part of the various alternative sources of energy, an important impediment in our developmental process could be removed. Energy, indisputably, is a very important input into development. The per capita energy consumption is taken as one of the indicators of development everywhere. We are far behind the developed countries in this regard. With so many advantages about it and with our own need for augmenting the various sources of energy being so acute, I hope, the coming years would witness rapid strides in fully exploiting all the alternative sources available.

Research and development in the coming years will have to give a boost to renewable energy technologies through new innovations and by making them commercially viable. We have to focus our attention on technology development, innovative applications and marketing strategy so that renewable energy can reach its full potential. One of the reasons for the non-utilisation of alternative sources is our inability to popularise their advantage *vis-a-vis* the conventional sources. This can be overcome through effective marketing strategies.

It is also important to pay attention to energy conservation and focus on enhancing energy efficiency. We have to realise the need for reducing wasteful consumption of energy and for improving efficiency of all energy consuming appliances. It has been estimated that about 10,000 MW power can be saved across the country by adopting energy conservation and efficiency measures. It is often said that energy saved is energy produced. While making efforts to tap the renewable resources of energy, we also have to ensure that the generated energy is not wasted.

Friends, seminars like this provide opportunities for people working in related fields to exchange views and share their experiences. I am sure that participants here will take full advantage of this opportunity and take our country towards a target of 'energy for all' through renewable and ecologically sustainable resources in the near future. I am sure, the collective endeavours of our Governments, our scientists and the initiatives taken by the non-governmental organisations would help us in realising this objective and make us achieve self-sufficiency in the energy sector. With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Seminar.

Thank you.

MONITORING MPLADS FUNDS*

I am very happy to be here and to have the opportunity to associate myself with this function. The software we have launched today for monitoring the works under the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) is a major initiative in facilitating the functioning of our members of Parliament. I am told that this is the first version and is fully loaded with a user-friendly format. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Shri Oscar Fernandes for taking the initiative for developing this much-needed programme of its kind for the use of our members of Parliament. You are thereby addressing a major difficulty the members have been experiencing all these years regarding the actual monitoring of the works taken up on their initiative under the MPLAD scheme.

I am sure, you all are aware of the factors and considerations that prevailed in introducing this novel Scheme in India in 1993. By giving a direct role to the representatives of the people in contributing towards the locally felt developmental needs of their constituents, this Scheme gives an opportunity to the members of Parliament to fulfil the needs of people at the grass root level. Not only does it enable the members to recommend developmental projects but also to back them up with the necessary funds. The most important feature of this Scheme is the direct and personal involvement of the members of Parliament in the developmental work in their constituencies. As you can visualise, facilitating the direct involvement of nearly 800 MPs through locally relevant works, with assured and timely funding, could make enormous impact on development in the country. But when you consider the average size of our constituency and the kind of demands made on an MP's time it is very important that we put mechanisms in place to facilitate their effective and efficient functioning. When we consider this, we will understand how relevant and important is the initiative taken by the monitoring Ministry under Shri Fernandes' leadership.

With the help of this software, Members can have easy access to the information and status of the ongoing works including their executions, expenditures incurred therein and the balances available from their MPLADS funds. I am told that the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

* At the launching of the software for monitoring of the work under the MPLAD Scheme, New Delhi (30 November 2004).

has developed this software with the help of the National Informatics Centre after conducting a pilot study in ten districts successfully. Its features like effective networking with the district, State and at the Central establishments, accessibility through the internet, etc. will help the members, our planners, academics, researchers and others interested in this unique and well-meaning scheme. The MPLADS website is hyper-linked to the Parliament website. This easy access will facilitate the members' functioning immensely. The Ministry has also released a Manual to help the software users. It gives the complete picture of the works recommended, sanctioned and executed under the MPLAD Scheme. I am sure, this will be very helpful to the MPs in the effective utilization of the funds allotted under the Scheme as also in its proper monitoring. The ultimate beneficiaries of all these initiatives will be our people.

I am also given to understand that Shri Farnandes' Ministry has already prepared an abstract of the status of implementation of the various projects under the MPLADS, to be made available to each member of Parliament soon. This is a commendable initiative. So is the step taken to interact with groups of MPs from a group of States for discussions on the Scheme. I am also told that the Ministry is in the process of revising the MPLADS guidelines. I hope the process will be expedited and the new Guidelines will be simpler and will reflect the experience gained so far. Today's programme includes video conferencing with Ministers and senior officers of the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Orissa, and Punjab. I congratulate all for attending this function to witness sincere and pragmatic efforts of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Thank you.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNANCE*

I consider it a matter of honour to be here and to have the opportunity to address this prestigious Association, on a topic of immense importance to our national life today. Accountability and transparency are talked about with equal seriousness among the corporate managers as is among those managing our public affairs. Ultimately, no one can dispute that the smooth management of our national affairs is accomplished only when every segment of our society discharges the tasks assigned to it efficiently and with commitment.

Friends, one of the most remarkable achievements of the previous century was the triumphant assertion of democracy as the most preferred form of Government, over all other systems already tested and tried through the past several centuries. Today, democracy having become well-established across the world, debate on democracy is taking a qualitatively new dimension marked by a shift from its form to its substance.

Any talk about accountability and transparency in governance can only be in the context of the people's rights in a democratic society. The concepts of accountability and transparency cannot be dissociated from democracy, they are inherent in it and are two of its fundamental attributes. However, of late, people in most democracies, particularly in the developing ones, appear to be increasingly dissatisfied because of the actions of those in power based on lack of information and credibility. It is more so because the people's expectation from democratic form of governance have changed over the years.

Today, people in well-established democracies look at democracy not just as a form of Government, but more as a way of governance and as a way of life. The test-case for a democratic society is no longer confined to a consideration of whether that society follows the commonly understood democratic procedures in the election or replacement of Government, but also of how seriously it applies the essential democratic principles in the day-to-day governance of that society. In this consideration, the processes and procedures traditionally associated with democracy are relegated to the

* At the Ahmedabad Management Association on *Accountability and Transparency in Governance*, Ahmedabad, Gujarat (26 December 2004).

background and the actual degree of responsibility, accountability and transparency a society displays is taken to be the yardstick for measuring the democratic content in that society.

Accountability essentially means that those who exercise power, whether as political executive, as elected representatives, or as appointed officials, have to show that they have exercised their powers and discharged their duties with responsibility consistent with their obligations to the society under the law and in a manner producing the best desirable results. The yardstick in gauging accountability would be by analysing whether or not the defined or desired result has been achieved from the exercise of power by public functionaries at different levels and also in apportioning responsibilities for non-achievement.

Transparency, on the other hand, to my mind, implies an open Government which means that information about factors influencing decisions, which have a bearing on any kind of public interest, by the public functionaries, should not be hidden from those who are likely to be affected positively or negatively by such decisions. In a democracy, the people have the fundamental right to know how a decision has been taken by any concerned authority. It assumes that only public interest, as opposed to private considerations, should influence such decisions. Demand for transparency has been gaining momentum in most democracies today, chiefly on account of various actions taken against public interest and in secrecy and growing incidents of corrupt practices in the matter of governance.

Today everyone recognizes that one of the greatest threats to democracy no longer comes from opposite ideologies but from corrupt practices. Corrupt practices, as opposed to 'corruption' *per se*, have a wider connotation as the former encompasses everything unethical in the different spheres of our national life – be they governmental and bureaucratic functioning or corporate governance.

Friends, when we look at these concepts, in the context of our country, the picture that emerges is not a very encouraging one. If today, in the 58th year of our Independence, we are still talking about addressing the problems that our Founding Fathers had identified as national priorities in the early years of our freedom, we cannot but conclude that our public functionaries have failed to deliver and come up to the expectations of our people. Accountability in governance has to be seen in the context of the foundations on which the Indian State is established and in the context of our Constitution which has sought to establish a *Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic, characterised by social, economic and political justice and the liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship and underlined by the equality of*

opportunity and the spirit of fraternity respecting the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. For a new Republic, its Constitution is, first and foremost, a commitment to the people, it is a guide and framework for governance and at the same time the fundamental law of the land.

Our Founding Fathers had a dream to make India a great nation within the shortest possible time. They had a vision for the whole country—an all inclusive vision—and that was to provide all the people with the basic necessities of life and everything else that was required for a dignified existence. It is this commitment to provide for their necessities and a dignified existence that runs through the entire text of our Constitution. The Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy, the different organs of the State and their diverse institutions, functioning under the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances, are all intended to ensure these commitments. Our Founding Fathers had rightly perceived that without freedom, you cannot ensure individual dignity and without the basic capacity to enjoy the freedom, this freedom and dignity have no meaning for the people. The basic philosophy of governance and the institutions meant for giving effect to that philosophy are all provided by the Constitution itself.

Friends, as we enter the seventh decade of our freedom, we need to ask ourselves, have we given our best to our people during all these years? Has the performance of those at the helm of affairs been up to the expectations of our people? Have we been able to evolve an efficient, people-friendly, responsive, transparent and accountable system of governance that would treat our people with dignity and respect due to them as citizens in a democracy? If today we are not in a position to give a positive answer to these questions, we have to ask ourselves, 'where did we go wrong?'

While conceding that we have achieved a lot on several fronts—social, economic and political—the question before us is 'have we progressed according to our potential?' What went wrong with our developmental planning? What happened to our endeavours which were to provide the foundations for development and self-reliance? What happened to our educational system, particularly to our centres of higher learning which were to have transformed themselves into centres of excellence over the years ? The other day I felt pained when I read that none of our more than 300 Universities and the deemed Universities, figure among the top 100 Universities in the world. Without excellence in education, how can we expect to produce excellence in national life? What has come of our public health care system, our public transport system, our roads and other public utilities?

What import does 'governance' have for the common people if it is not making a difference to their lives? If today we are still confronted with problems like large-scale poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, large-scale corruption, social discord, communal disharmony, lack of a sound infrastructure base, etc. the over-bearing factor responsible for this, to my mind, is the lack of accountability of our public functionaries towards our people all these years.

The administrative systems meant to provide justice and relief to the common man have failed to evolve an efficient people-friendly and responsive structure and to earn people's confidence. The responsibility for this lies with the different levels of administration. We cannot allow responsibility and accountability to be lost in the maze of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Our people cannot be expected to wait for systemic changes to be brought about. We have to make the existing system deliver.

Friends, we should not forget that it is within the framework of the existing system that we produced the Green and the White revolutions, that we made rapid strides in space and defence-related fields, in information and communication technologies, atomic energy, etc. We succeeded in these areas because there was a national urge to succeed. With a deep sense of accountability, and a sense of commitment and drive to do so, we can achieve success in other areas also. Today our young professionals earn respectability and appreciation in every part of the world. Their performance record is second to none in the world. With such assets we can make rapid strides, if all of us—in public, private and corporate and other sectors—act with a sense of discipline and accountability and in an honest and transparent manner.

If those managing the public and corporate affairs do not demonstrate the desired level of accountability, our quality of governance in different sectors is bound to remain poor and the performance of our people is bound to remain low and the pace of development will be slow. The State being the highest public enterprise, it is important to ensure the best performance of its every segment and the measuring yardstick in that is the satisfaction of the people themselves. This has to be accomplished in a people-friendly manner rather than by putting additional burden on the common people.

The Government has to discharge its accountability to the people who enforce them through their chosen representatives who are elected to the House of People. This is one of the basic postulates of our Constitution which gives primacy to the people's right to know while imposing obligations of accountability on the Government.

Eradication of corruption from every sphere of our national life is another primary pre-condition for bringing about responsible and accountable governance. For this it is imperative to make the entire machinery of Government more open as corruption thrives mostly in secrecy.

Transparency and accountability in governance are mutually reinforcing. Every activity dealing with the people—be it in Government or corporate sector—should be through transparent processes. Excessive secrecy ultimately results in denial of people's rights. Accountability and transparency are not to be seen as concessions to the people, they are fundamental in public affairs and are the inherent rights of the people.

Transparency is often confused with the right to information of the people. To my mind, though both are related concepts, transparency in governance goes much beyond the right to information. Very often genuine demands for openness and transparency is dismissed in the name of either being politically motivated or as having the potential to harm the national interest or in the name of having an adverse effect on the morale of the services, etc. The people's right to know the justifications for governmental actions is a sacred right in a democracy. Questions motivated by the desire to see that the public resources are managed efficiently and transparently have to be viewed beyond the Government's often misplaced emphasis on secrecy. Similar is the obligation of the corporate sector when it deals with the people and public funds. Respect to the notions of transparency has to be demonstrated by all institutions. It cannot be accomplished by the effort of any single institution.

Citizens are in the best position to observe mismanagement or malfeasance that occurs in their community and affects their daily life. As the ultimate beneficiaries, as also the ones who bear the impact of funding, they have a vested interest in ensuring transparency in the processes of procurement, of awarding public contracts, in the proper scrutiny of cost-estimates, in ensuring compliance with the quality specifications by the executing agencies and in the timely completion of projects so that they could take the benefit of their early and efficient completion.

Thus, the civil society has an important role to play in bringing about transparency and accountability in governance. This role goes beyond fault-finding. It has to be more pro-active and should take on the responsibility as active citizens building a better tomorrow rather than seeing themselves as always being at the receiving end. As it is said, eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. This role of public vigilance can be played effectively if there is proper decentralization in the administration and if the citizens are properly made aware of their rights. In a decentralized planning process, the local citizens become its integral part and in such an atmosphere it is more likely

that the people will take direct and active interest in the success of the projects, without giving scope for corrupt practices to creep in.

Education of the masses also plays an important role in achieving transparency in administration. As a preventive instrument, it helps in preparing the society about the dangers of corruption and its many forms. Secondly, it helps in raising awareness about and empowers people to fight corruption with effective methods and tools.

An important institution that needs to reform itself in the context of transparency in governance is the political Parties in the country which provide the Governments in our democracy. If their functioning is not transparent and if they adopt questionable methods in raising funds and if they allow undeserving people into the public arena, our political processes will never be transparent.

A free Press is also essential to bring about transparency in the functioning of public institutions and in enforcing accountability. Representatives of the Media committed to investigating and reporting on issues relating to integrity in the functioning of Government do a great service to democracy. It is, however, important for the Media to provide information without political bias and to uphold high professional and ethical standards, while dealing with the issues of transparency in governance. The endeavour of all institutions should be to safeguard and strengthen the edifice of democracy in the country.

Another important prerequisite for transparency and accountability in governance is the integrity and effectiveness of our judicial system. It is undoubtedly the responsibility of our political leadership to establish mechanisms for the speedy disposal of cases in the country. However, ultimately, the quality of our justice delivery system is dependent on the efficiency and integrity of the judicial organ of the State itself. Transparency in the judicial process is fundamental for transparency and accountability in governance. One would expect that even if all other organs of the State fails, the judiciary will stand up for the rights of the people. Ultimately, unless the machinery of our Government and our society as a whole inculcates a basic culture of justice, we will not succeed in bringing about an acceptable level of transparency and accountability in governance. This applies equally, if not with greater force, to the corporate sector also.

Friends, providing institutions of governance is much easier than making them function in a manner sensitive to the needs of the people, accommodating the concerns of the marginalised, and with an all inclusive and long-term vision for the whole country. Towards the end of the deliberations of our

Constituent Assembly, its President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, exhorted its Members and stated:

> We have prepared a democratic Constitution. But successful working of democratic institutions requires in those who have to work them willingness to respect the view-points of others, capacity for compromise and accommodation... .

Friends, as I said in the beginning accountability and transparency in governance is about the substance of democracy. If we waste our valuable time debating about forms, the substance of governance will be lost. Most important requirement for democratic institutions to perform well is to create conditions for those institutions to function. If institutions invested with the responsibility to hold the Government and the administration accountable on a continuous basis are not allowed to function in an orderly manner, we will be missing important democratic options for ensuring accountability in governance. It is of utmost importance to facilitate their functioning and to use them as effective fora before which all other institutions of governance ultimately have to submit.

Reminding the American youth of the value of their Constitution for posterity, one of the greatest American Jurists, Mr. Joseph Story, said:

> Let the American youth never forget that they possess (in their Constitution) a noble inheritance, bought by the toils and sufferings and blood of their ancestors and capable, if wisely improved, and faithfully guarded, of transmitting to their latest posterity all the substantial blessings of life, the peaceful enjoyment of liberty, property, religion, and independence... . It may, nevertheless, perish in an hour by the folly, or corruption, or negligence of its only keepers, THE PEOPLE. Republics are created. ...by the virtue, public spirit, and intelligence of the citizens. They fall, when the wise are banished from the public councils, because they dare to be honest, and the profligate are rewarded, because they flatter the people, in order to betray them.

Public functionaries holding power in a democracy wield that power in the name of the people. That power is expected to be used as a tool to contribute to their welfare and not as a means to dominate them. Power brings with it responsibility and this responsibility should be discharged in an accountable and transparent manner. And once power is used so, its consequence is bound to be the welfare of the masses.

Friends, I am happy that I had this opportunity to share my thoughts with you on this important subject today. Thank you for your patient hearing.

NORTH-EAST INDIA : PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS*

I am extremely happy to be in your midst here today on the occasion of Eighth Conference of the North-East Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I would like to take this opportunity to felicitate the North-East Region CPA for having organised this Conference at Agartala, the capital city of Tripura, which is not only an area of special characteristics in terms of its rich culture, history and geography, but is also known for its incredible beauty.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as we all know has remained a guardian of parliamentary democracy ever since its inception more than nine decades ago. During its long and eventful history, the CPA has spared no effort in promoting the spirit of the Commonwealth, based on mutual cooperation in the quest of peace and democracy, building bridges of understanding among peoples belonging to various racial, religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, reinforcing democracy and parliamentary institutions, ensuring human rights and basic freedoms and providing Governments responsive to the urges and aspirations of the people.

It is a pleasure to learn that besides organising the annual Conferences, the CPA has been organising Regional Conferences from time to time. The subjects for discussion in these Conferences focus on various regional issues. Apart from providing an insight into the peculiar problems of the region, these Conferences play a crucial role in promoting contacts among parliamentarians as also between parliamentarians and the people.

Friends, the North-Eastern States of India occupy a unique position in our polity. The ethnicity, culture and folklore of the North-East form a rich mosaic in the fabric of our body politic. It has been a gateway of culture and commerce that linked India overland to East and South-East Asia. Political frontiers converge and overlap here. Apart from this, the region represents an ethno-cultural frontier, encompassing much of India's rich and lesser-known heritage, a complex transition zone of linguistic, racial and religious streams. It is in recognition of the special significance of the North-East in terms of its geographical location and unique characteristics of its tribal population that the framers of our Constitution introduced special provisions in our Constitution to deal with the Scheduled and Tribal Areas.

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* At the inauguration of the Eighth North-East Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (NERCPA) Conference, Agartala (16 January 2005).

It needs to be understood that while the North-East Region is afflicted with several problems such as inadequate infrastructural development, low levels of industrialisation and insurgency, it also has several strengths such as diversified natural resources endowments, favourable agro-climatic conditions and high literacy rates. Another strong point of the region is that women enjoy a higher social status than in other parts of the country. Besides, women's work participation also is higher than the all-India average.

However, it is an unpalatable fact that despite being rich in mineral and forest resources and having various strengths, the North-East suffers from stagnation in terms of development and is also caught in a vicious circle of insurgency, poverty, economic backwardness and unemployment. It has led to a feeling of neglect and alienation among some sections of the people. The reasons for this can be attributed to the region's geographical isolation from the rest of the country, inadequate infrastructure, peculiar geographical features and a host of other factors.

One of the significant trends of the day in the North-Eastern region which is really a matter of concern to all of us, is insurgency and ethnic rivalries. Without peace in the region, no economic or social development is posisble. The need of the hour is for tribal interests to be harmonised and tribal rivalries to be transformed into healthy competition for the amelioration of the lot of the masses. Equally important is the need to bring about emotional integration between the people of the North-East and the rest of the country, while safeguarding the distinctive ethnic and cultural identity of the people of the North-East. This objective can be achieved only when the decision-makers and the people in the rest of the country are sensitive to the problems and issues concerning the people of the North-East.

It is also necessary to generate through the print and electronic media, better and greater awareness about the problems being faced by the people of the North-Eastern region, amongst the people of the rest of the country. The mass media can play a vital role in projecting the social and cultural life of the people of this region objectively and in proper perspective. Social and emotional integration can come about only by a meaningful intermingling of the people themselves. New strategies need to be formulated to revitalize the developmental activities in the region.

The Government of India recognises that the problems facing the North-East need to be addressed collectively by the States of the region with the active involvement of the Centre. A major initiative in this direction was taken by the Central Government when the North Eastern Council (NEC) was constituted by an act of Parliament way back in 1971. In the year 2001, the Government also set up an exclusive Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region to deal with matters pertaining to socio-economic development

of the States in this region. The Ministry looks into the work undertaken by various institutions involved in this region and is actively involved in the planning and execution of various infrastructure-related projects. It ensures that projects keep to their deadlines and that no wastage occurs due to lack of coordination.

Way back in 1996, the Government had announced new initiatives for speedier development of this region. It included full funding and quarterly monitoring of all the ongoing Central projects and accorded high priority to employment generation—particularly to the educated unemployed youth—through an Employment Assurance Scheme. To complete these objectives, IGNOU has also been involved for 'Educational Development of North-East and Sikkim'. In 2002, a Computer Literacy Programme was also launched as the knowledge of computers has not only become necessary for any job but it also opens up a vast pool of other opportunities and knowledge. The keen interest evinced all through by the Government of India, our Parliament and various other official and non-official agencies in the development of this region amply testifies to the fact that the North-East occupies a special place in the hearts and minds of our countrymen.

I find from the agenda of the Conference that two important subjects are going to be deliberated "Role of North-Eastern Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy in the North-East and Role of North-East Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Development of Communication and Economic backwardness in the North-East Region". Needless to say, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, with its long experience of promoting democratic values, is the right forum to achieve these laudable objectives. The North-East Region CPA is responsible for promoting the knowledge of the constitutional, legislative, economic, social and cultural aspects of parliamentary democracy. By taking continued interest in this region, the CPA can play a significant role in strengthening the democratic forces.

Friends, it has been established beyond doubt that democracy is the most preferred way to function, especially in view of the diverse nature of people and their cultures. The triumph of democracy in the world indicates that in future, dialogue and debate will decide local, regional, national and global issues. Strong traditions of democracy lead to peace, which is a prerequisite for socio-economic development of any country or region. We have to try to instil these values in the people and make them realise the futility of violence and hatred. There is nothing which cannot be resolved through peaceful means and negotiations. It is here that organisations like the North-East Region CPA can play a vital role through their multifarious activities.

The common remedy for various ills in the North-East is development of the economy and infrastructure such as transport and communication and the removal of unemployment. The importance of communication in the removal of poverty as well as in bringing people together is self-evident. We have to make a concerted effort to utilise the strengths of the region — its forests, water and mineral resources, floral and faunal diversity. The economy of the region is primarily agrarian but its full potential is yet to be harnessed. It is only by analysing the weaknesses of the earlier programmes that we can make fresh strategies for the development of this area.

We have to pay special attention to the agro-based economy of this region as agriculture provides livelihood to 78 per cent of the population here. Agriculture may be the mainstay of the North-Eastern economy, but the fact is that the agricultural produce of this region is not able to take care of its population. Special care needs to be taken to ensure that common people are extended all possible help to optimise their land, more so as the agricultural land here gives only one produce a year. We have to think of ways to provide gainful employment to the population during the non-agricultural season when they are out of work. Such work will not only help them improve their economic conditions but will also contribute to the overall development of the region and bring peace to the area.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Eighth North-East Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference. I am sure that your deliberations will be fruitful and throw up new ideas and perspectives, which will help in strengthening democracy in the North-East.

Thank you.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES*

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to be here today and to have the opportunity to associate myself with this Conference. I extend a hearty welcome to you all, particularly to our friends from other countries, to New Delhi and to this Conference here. I am happy to note that a large number of professionals associated with information management in the Libraries of their respective Parliaments have assembled here to deliberate on important issues pertinent to their field of work.

Friends, one of the most remarkable developments of the last quarter of the previous century was the emergence of democracy as the most preferred and accepted system of governance across the world. Another equally remarkable development of this period was the revolutionary growth in the field of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). The immediate impact of the developments in the ICTs is in the information explosion and the resultant evolution of an information-driven world order. Information is seen as the greatest source of power in today's world. This is all the more so for people involved in managing public affairs, especially for people's representatives.

It is said that knowledge begets ideas and ideas beget change. In a parliamentary democracy, the parliamentarians, as leaders of society are also the agents of change. The quality of change is inevitably linked to the extent and the quality of information the harbingers of change are endowed with. The crucial input that goes into the formulation of policies and into any effective legislation is the quantum and the quality of knowledge on which such policy or legislation is based.

Easy access to objective and quality information is thus an essential requirement for the representative institutions to function in a purposive manner. In this task, information managers in the Parliament Libraries have an important role to play. I understand that the APLAP was founded with the prime object of sharing professional expertise and experience of personnel working in the field of information management in the Parliaments of the Asia-Pacific region.

* At the inauguration of the Eighth Biennial Conference of the Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific (APLAP)), New Delhi (18 January 2005).

Friends, Parliament today stands at the centre of the entire spectrum of democratic processes, addressing various issues and striving to meet effectively the democratic aspirations of the people. As the supreme legislative and representative body and as a multifunctional institution, Parliament is responsible for legislation, overseeing of administration, passing of budget, ventilation of public grievances and deliberating on national and international issues, particularly the developmental issues. To deliberate and discuss meaningfully and to take informed decisions, parliamentarians must have unrestrained access to authentic, objective, balanced and non-partisan information. An informed parliamentarian can be of immense help in the emergence of an informed democracy. Similarly, an informed electorate can strengthen the edifice of democracy. The right to know and the right to information thus become crucial factors in a successful democratic system.

It is in this context that the Library and Information Management Centres of Parliaments can play a crucial role in the dissemination of information to the Parliament and its members as also in the dissemination of information about Parliament to the people at large. Only a focussed, research-oriented and specialized Library with a commitment to the cause of democracy can cater to the needs of the parliamentarians effectively in today's information-driven society. It is, therefore, essential that the Legislature should develop its own independent mechanisms for intelligent collection, safe storage, expeditious retrieval and timely dissemination of information. These activities have to be necessarily centred around a well-organised and professionally managed Library.

Being the repositories of knowledge and wisdom, Libraries, especially Parliament Libraries, have to become integral parts of democratic societies. If properly utilized, they can be turned into great assets to the citizens by helping their representatives to participate more effectively in the democratic processes and in making informed decisions on matters of policy and administration. Libraries should be able to supply unbiased and objective material representing all points of view on a given topic.

The revolutionary breakthroughs in the field of information and communication technologies have impacted our lives in many ways, touching upon virtually all aspects of human activity. The ICT revolution has also influenced the way information is stored, processed, managed, retrieved and disseminated. A great quantum of information is generated every moment on virtually every conceivable subject today. The ability to collect, store and disseminate such information has become a vital tool and a basis of power, especially for decision-makers and opinion leaders. The telecommunication network, the advent of computerization, the advancements in satellite communication and the onset of the internet have all led to a virtual collapse

of territorial boundaries and geographical barriers today. This has also contributed significantly in popularizing democratic ideals and in transforming many non-democratic regimes into democracy.

Friends, today, information has become the most vital and the basic resource for the advancement of society. To access accurate, exhaustive and objective information within the shortest possible time, we need to rely on the latest available technologies in this area. These technologies have made their impact on Parliaments too in the context of information management. Since Libraries are mostly concerned with the storage and retrieval of information, the ICTs have influenced their working also in a substantial way. Libraries are increasingly getting centered around the use of internet and other networks and the possibility of a Library without walls is not a distant dream but a virtual reality today. The age of 'Paperless Libraries' does not appear to be too far! The focus today should be on the networking of the Library and the professional excellence of the information managers and access to information rather than on the traditional method of acquisition and collection of the sources which contained such information.

In this context, it is of utmost importance that the Parliament Libraries are well connected and resources are shared. Such sharing will also help us to know how other Parliaments work, the procedures followed in different Legislatures, how the Committees function, how the Committee reports are prepared and above all, how Executive accountability to the Legislature is ensured.

Friends, as information and library specialists, you are aware that, today, a vast array of literature is available on each and every subject. In the case of a Parliament Library, the quantity of information available and managed is enormous as these are considered to be institutions of national importance, serving a large number of members of Parliament in effectively discharging their responsibilities as elected representatives. It is the role and responsibility of the personnel of the Parliament Library, both as professionals and as citizens in a democracy, to provide unbiased, objective, factual and analytical information to the members of Parliament at short notice. On occasions, members may not find time to go through the catalogue, go to the racks or sit at the computers to access information, as they always have a large constituency to attend to, many routine letters to answer, several public functions to attend and many other responsibilities. That being so, it is important that a member of Parliament must be served by the Parliament Library in the most efficient manner.

A Library or a Research Official should be able to provide him with the latest and the most relevant information on any subject expeditiously. In

addition, Libraries and Research Services should always keep a vigil on the latest developments in all fields and bring out well-documented research studies on important topics, even without a formal request from a member. With the help of such documents, along with their personal understanding of issues and grass root experience, members will be able to function more effectively in discharging their varied responsibilities in the Parliament, in its Committees and in their constituencies. The Library has to play a proactive role in the dissemination of authentic information to the members. It should have sufficient number of subject and area specialists who can give the correct lead and valuable research support to the members on a continuous basis.

It will also be helpful if Parliament Libraries can conduct Seminars, Workshops and Symposia on topics of interest to the members. This can help them in sharing ideas and in understanding issues from a broader perspective. Such efforts will also help in augmenting the knowledge and skills of the people who manage the library and research services. Members will then be able to take full advantage of the vast resources in the Library and the expertise and knowledge base of the officers of the Library.

Friends, from the detailed agenda of the Conference, I understand that you will be deliberating on important subjects of professional interest relating to information management in the Parliament Libraries. This kind of interaction would help the experts in sharing their experience and expertise. It will help all of you to serve the institution you work for more effectively and contribute towards strengthening the democratic fabric in your respective countries. I congratulate the APLAP for providing this forum for the benefit of the member Parliaments of the Asia-Pacific region.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Conference. I am sure, the deliberations of this Conference would go a long way in enabling the Library and the information managers to assist the Parliaments and the parliamentarians to function more effectively, thereby helping in strengthening democracy in the Asia-Pacific region. I extend my best wishes for the success of the Conference.

Thank you.

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN HUMAN ENDEAVOURS*

At the outset, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Chairman ınd the members of the Governing Body of the Bharat Asmita National \wards Committee for inviting me to be the Chief Guest today. It is indeed ın honour to be called upon to associate with this function and to have the ›pportunity to present the first prestigious Bharat Asmita National Awards o the distinguished recipients. These Awards will no doubt very soon be egarded as one of the most important recognition at the national level of ome of our outstanding persons for their dedicated service to the country in 'arious disciplines and for their contribution to nation-building.

I wish to express my deepest appreciation of the unique role played by Dr. Vishwanath Karad and his colleagues in setting up the Maharashtra \cademy of Engineering & Educational Research (MAEER) and building everal temples of learning of the highest standards and achievement. Friends, he Maharashtra Academy of Engineering & Education Research has grown nto a large institutional network within two decades, contributing immensely o the cause of education and particularly of learning of technology and nanagement and to the development of this region and the country as a vhole. The focus on medical, scientific, technical, management, education nd other specialised areas of contemporary relevance, makes their efforts all he more significant today. MAEER is rendering tremendous national service nd should be the role model for others to follow. I greatly appreciate the mphasis on discipline and character building by the Institution, whose affairs re being guided by an extremely learned and competent Team including the ıembers of this Awards Committee. It is indeed an extremely laudable ıitiative on the part of MIT School of Management, one of the pioneering ıstitutes under MAEER to have introduced National Awards to celebrate xcellence in human endeavour. Needless to say, such Awards go a long way ı ensuring realization of our cherished dream of making India globally ompetitive and respected. They also foster professionalism, dedication and ommitment among our citizens, which provide the trigger to scale new ieights and push the frontiers of new achievements.

At the function to give away the Bharat Asmita National Awards, Pune (3 February 2005).

I wish to extend my heartiest congratulations to today's awardees—Bharat Asmita Jana-Pratinidhi Shrestha, Shri Dayanidhi Maran, a young leader who has excelled in Parliament and public life; Bharat Asmita Acharya Shrestha, Dr. M. Rammohan Rao, who has made excellent contribution in the field of management education; and Bharat Asmita Jana-Jagran Shrestha, Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan, who has made his mark by building public awareness on key issues of public life and by his untiring efforts for ensuring good governance through his organization, Lok Satta. It is unfortunate that the other Jana-Pratinidhi Shrestha Awardee, Dr. Shrikant R. Jichkar, is no more with us. I had the privilege of knowing him. He was a highly accomplished academician and promising Parliamentarian and his loss will continue to be greatly felt by all.

Friends, through these Awardees, the Organisers have, in fact, honoured achievers representing the important pillars of society, comprising academia, public servants and popular institutions, each crucial in its own way for the sustenance of democracy and for providing quality life to people. It is only when different constituents of society discharge their functions effectively that public affairs become service-oriented and people-oriented. The serious problems we encounter can be resolved by good performance and by bridging the gap between what is ideally expected and what is actually achieved. It is often said that we have great ideas, wonderful policies and meticulously drawn up programmes, but one of our singular failures lies in that we hardly achieve them in their intended spirit.

I am very happy to note that the Asmita Jana-Pratinidhi Shrestha Award acknowledges young, budding parliamentarians at the beginning of their careers. The present Lok Sabha has a good number of talented young members. The country has great expectations from them to help in bringing about significant transformation in our lives. I am confident that they will live up to these expectations.

As Speaker of the Lok Sabha, I have the opportunity to observe the performance of Shri Dayanidhi Maran, one of our young and dynamic Cabinet Minister, who is handling a very challenging and important portfolio. The ease and the efficiency with which he handles parliamentary matters and the proactive leadership he is providing to the Ministry are indeed commendable.

Being the largest and one of the most vibrant democracies in the world, it is incumbent on us in Parliament to set high standards, in keeping with the dignity of the great institution, which could be emulated by others. I am sorry to observe that this does not always happen. Various efforts are being made to effect an improvement in the situation and I would like to highlight that to make the performance of the Parliamentarians more open to public

scrutiny, we have launched two dedicated Channels for live telecast of the proceedings of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Content development for the Channels, especially during the Inter-Session period, has also been taken in hand and it is my dream to see these develop as the living links between the Parliament and the people. I hope that the people who have the right to know how their elected representatives are functioning in the most important constitutional institution of our country will take keen interests to follow the proceedings and express their views in a constructive manner.

Public awakening and pressure are, the most effective means of ensuring performance by public figures. As we know, the Right to Information Bill owes much to a ground swell of demand for greater accountability and transparency. Peoples' movements, on all major developmental issues, should energise popular institutions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, which have been globally accepted.

An important area where we need to focus our attention is in ensuring that maximum benefits of the investments on developmental programmes reach the target groups without delay. For this, it is necessary to instil an abiding sense of accountability in everyone associated with public life and public service. We need to put in place effective mechanisms to ensure transparency at every level of governance. Corruption also impedes development. The increasing signs of popular disenchantment with the style of functioning of our system is very closely related to the absence of transparency and accountability among those in positions of responsibility and in public affairs.

Friends, even after nearly six decades of freedom, we have not come close to achieving our developmental potential. This is where we have to underscore the very critical role for our educational institutions. I need not dwell on the tasks ahead in this sector as we are all conscious of it. However, I cannot but emphasize the need to synergise the efforts of the Government and civil society in this regard. In the context of the Asmita Award for Management Education, one should highlight the unique contributions that are required of professional institutions. Management professionals can and must contribute effectively to the balanced and sustainable development of the country. Application of modern and appropriate management practices is needed in all sectors, and perhaps much more so today in the Government sector and public Organisations. Institutions of Management therefore need to be oriented and motivated to reach out and produce public-spirited, socially sensitive professionals capable of addressing the concerns of the common people of the country so that they are also able to enjoy the benefit of economic development and we as a country are able to achieve growth with equity.

Friends, what is important is to promote excellence in every walk of life in our country. As an eminent thinker puts it: 'To attain greatness, a man must excel. And to hold his position one must keep right on excelling... getting to the top is a tough assignment; staying there is tougher. The secret of greatness is simple: Do better work than any other man in your field .... The price of being a top notcher is terrific. Few of us are willing to pay it.'

The pursuit of excellence has to become a national motto and shared aspiration if we are to occupy a pride of place among nations. This has to be translated into our national movement of the 21st Century, in which all sections of civil society and the institutions of Government participate with equal sincerity and commitment. While aspiring to be a knowledge superpower, we must facilitate creation of opportunities for millions of achievers in all fields, cutting across the diverse mosaic of our country.

I once again congratulate the Awardees for their achievements. I am sure they will serve as role models and promote excellence in different walks of our national life. I also extend my best wishes to the Maharashtra Academy of Engineering and Education Research and MIT School of Management for their far-sighted and significant interventions to nurture our valued human resource capital.

Thank you.

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN NATION-BUILDING*

It is indeed an honour and a special privilege for me to be invited to leliver the Convocation Address of this prestigious University. I am grateful o the Vice-Chancellor and the University Administration for giving me this ıpportunity to be here and to share my thoughts with you all today.

Over its little more than four decades of existence, the North Bengal Jniversity has remarkable achievements to its credit and has grown into a najor centre of learning, making its mark on the region and the State as a vhole and beyond. The University's academic accomplishments and its special ndeavours and initiatives in introducing new areas of study and research, specially professional subjects of contemporary interests like Tea Management, Tourism & Travel Management, Environmental Laws, Disaster Management, Museum Studies, Information and Communications Technology ınd its Distance Education Programmes, deserve appreciation. Everyone ıssociated with this University can be proud of its growth and ıccomplishments over the years.

The spread of undergraduate education in North Bengal University has ıeen phenomenal. Having only 16 colleges in 1962, the University now ffiliates as many as 74 colleges. It has also been playing an important role ı social and economic transformation by catering to the needs of a large ıumber of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students. Many deserving tudents in the backward areas of North Bengal fail to get admission in olleges and University departments due to limited number of seats. To meet ıe needs of these students, the North Bengal University established the Directorate of Distance Education' in 2001-2002, thus creating a network of 'ost-Graduate and Under Graduate education in selected subjects under istance education mode. This, I am sure, will go a long way in transforming ıe social base.

I am happy to learn that the University has taken various steps to create uman resource in diverse fields of Information and Communication echnology, for which many courses are now conducted in the Department f Computer Science and at the Information Technology Centre in the Jniversity campus. Professional courses like the BCA and the BBA at first

* At the Convocation of the University of North Bengal, Kolkata (14 February 2005).

degree level have also been introduced. Besides, the University has highly qualified academics. This is no mean achievement for any University. I would like to offer my hearty congratulations to all those who have excelled in their studies, by their strenuous work and disciplined effort, and are going to receive their honours and degrees today. I extend my best wishes to all of them and hope that they all will be able to contribute towards nation-building in the years ahead, fulfilling their own desires and ambitions in the process, as they grow up as important members of the society.

Friends, through education not only we acquire knowledge but it is the most effective tool for nurturing social and moral values. In a plural society like ours, it is through broad-based and secular education that we can hope to foster values which can help in promoting national integration and in producing global citizens. It is in transforming a child into a socially useful member of the community that the importance of education lies. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'Education is not the amount of information that is put into our brain which runs riot undigested all through our lives. It is a process of man-making, character-forming and life-building assimilation of ideas.' The basic aim of education is to equip us to face the challenges of life. It is education which makes us better citizens and inculcates in us virtues of tolerance, discipline, commitment, culture, compassion and sensitivity. It is only a good educational system that can establish a healthy relationship between the individuals and the society. The development of the individual enriches society; and a well-organised and free society provides ample opportunities for the individual to grow. In this endeavour, the parents, the teachers, the educational institutions themselves and the State as such play very important roles.

The importance of education in the challenging task of the socio-economic transformation of our country can hardly be overemphasised. In our country, it should reinforce the lofty values of secularism and humanism and should strengthen the fabric of national integration. A University stands, as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, 'for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for onward march of the human race towards higher objectives. If the Universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people. But if the temple of learning itself becomes a home of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation progress or a person grow in stature?'

It is stating the obvious that Universities not only impart knowledge, but also play a crucial role in the growth and progress of a nation. Apart from generating intellectual or professional environment, needed in a developing country like India, Universities create among students a thirst for knowledge

and inquisitiveness. It is through good University education that we can build a prosperous, egalitarian, inclusive and humane society. A University is not a place where formal education is imparted only to enable the students to earn a livelihood. It is a place where everyone strives for excellence; where young boys and girls are given such education as may move them away from deep-rooted prejudices, cramping customs, superstitions and stultifying traditions. True education is indeed a liberating force, cutting across all narrow barriers and enables us to think critically and scientifically.

Our system of education must look at vocational training, bringing in the skills relevant to our daily life. It should have a practical bias and establish linkage between education and employing agencies to the mutual benefit of both. Meeting the needs for sustainable livelihoods calls for an approach to education that would equip young people with the skills that would help them take control of their lives and improve the quality of their lives. Besides, the courses offered should meet the needs of the people and help fulfil their hopes and aspirations.

Friends, traditionally in India, education was monopolised by a very small segment of the society. As such, a need was felt for its expansion. It is in this context that the concept of universal elementary education was incorporated in the Constitution of free India. Our commitment should be that all those who were denied education should now have an access to education. This access should begin from the primary school. It is important to give education to all because the lack of primary education impedes growth and development. As Prof. Amartya Sen has observed, 'if we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just but also less secure'.

Though our Constitution envisages compulsory and free education to children, it is unfortunate that not much progress has been made in achieving universal elementary education. It is a matter of regret that the mainstream education is available only to the more affluent section of the population. There is a wide gap between the opportunities available to the rich, educated and urban-centred people and the poor illiterate or semi-literate, rural and other disadvantageously placed. Socio-economic development is bypassing a significant segment of our population today as they do not have access to a quality education relevant to their requirements. Only through universalisation of education, laying special stress on vocational education and on the education of the girl child can we bring about qualitative improvement in the lives of our people. Since our country has adopted the democratic way of life, we will be able to reap the benefits of democracy only through the participation of all sections of our people in the process of nation-building.

Transforming our huge human resources into an asset is one of the greatest developmental challenges we have before us today. India has enormous unexploited potential as a 'knowledge hub' for the world. In fact, the rest of the world recognizes this distinct advantage that we have, which can give a great momentum to our economic development. For this, the most important prerequisite is an emphasis on quality education. The impact that the Indian professionals are making in several parts of the world today, as world class professionals, should inspire our youth to perform better and through them to transform our country too.

Friends, another area, requiring our most urgent attention, to my mind, is that of the lack of facilities for and the quality of research in our institutions of higher learning. The quality of research today leaves much to be desired as the facilities for research are negligible and infrastructure is hardly adequate. In modern times, the development and progress of a country in education is decided by the availability of facilities and equipment needed for research. In these days of technological development, in a competitive world, to keep pace with and outshine others, we will have to depend on the achievements made by our research scholars. By focussing on research-based education can we improve the content of our education and hope to produce world-class scholars. Scientific progress in the country and social progress as such can be achieved only through quality research. An exercise to objectively rank the world's Universities, carried out recently by the Institute for Higher Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, pointed out that none of the Indian Universities are the powerhouses of research that they ought to be. Not a single Indian University, out of about 2,000 Universities from all over the world, for which the group collected the data, is in the top one hundred rankings. Several Chinese universities and universities in Brazil rank much above India's.

It is, therefore, time we reviewed the importance of research in our education curriculum and make research and development the barometer of the country's progress. It is essential that adequate funds, from official and non-official sources, should be available, so that more and more students can engage in research to excel in their area of work that will also considerably reduce the brain drain from our country, about which we express a lot of concern but do nothing. It is also important to bear in mind that the primary social agenda of education is the development of our human resources in a manner which will meet with the larger national requirements. Our limited resources should not be wasted in the endeavours of confusing faith with history and mythology with science. Education is essentially about rational enquiry. Ultimately, only through a progressive and forward-looking education can we succeed in pulling down the walls that divide our people from one another and bring about an India truly integrated. To quote Gurudev: 'The

highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.'

The importance of education in a democracy is self evident. It has to be kept in mind that students of today are the citizens of tomorrow. A democracy that is based on faith in the rights of every single individual can succeed only with the help of an education that aims at the all-round development of every individual's personality. Democracy can not fully succeed if the benefits of education do not percolate down to the masses. Education has always been a pillar upon which democracy is built. In fact, the relationship between the two is a reciprocal one. Democracy believes in the dignity of each and every individual. Such dignity is based on the assumption of the infinite value and worth of human personality. This holds good for everybody, irrespective of gender, colour, race or religion.

The keynotes to democratization of education are equal as well as broad access to education. Democratizing education does not only mean giving education to more people but also involving more people in educational management, selected through a democratic process. Traditional education fails to adapt itself to the needs of the growing number of people. As such, it needs to be remodelled by the people themselves as they are the best judges of their needs and aspirations.

In a country where we are still far away from universal education, students should make full use of precious years in the University. May I remind them that the years spent as a student is not only a great learning period but is also the best period in one's life. The future of a nation is built upon character. Whether it is in public life or in student life, we cannot reach great heights if we lack in commitment, discipline and concern for the country and the people. India expects of the students that their lives should be clean and noble.

Friends, we have all along been claiming to be the biggest democracy in the world. We indeed are. But what is the actual quality of our democracy ? Is democracy all about its forms? Who will provide substance as well as sustenance to our democracy ? The stage of our attainment in democracy has to be assessed in terms of the impact it makes on the quality of living of the people. I come across a large number of citizens, particularly our youth, who are concerned about the content and quality of our democracy and about the declining values in our national life today. Our common people are concerned about the emergence of divisive agenda in our national politics, about corruption eating into the vitals of our nation, about the intrusion of undesirable elements into the political arena, into our institutions of democracy and about development not taking the centre-stage of political discourse in

the country. I do share their concerns. We should not forget that the elements who corrupt our political system and vitiate the social atmosphere are as much the products of our educational system as are of the socio-political systems. No segments of the society can, therefore, absolve themselves of their responsibility in coming to the stage where we are today.

When we adopted a parliamentary system of Government in the wake of freedom, the objective was to provide an all-inclusive and participatory system of Government to our people. While taking part in the political processes, everyone was expected to contribute towards strengthening our democratic process and institutions. Strengthening them demands many virtues from both the leaders and the people. Among other things, it demands self-discipline of a very high order. It demands a high degree of tolerance. Of even more importance is the ability to work together, allowing democratic institutions to function in a disciplined manner and addressing the concerns of the people. It demands a shared vision for the future and a commitment to realize that vision.

Friends, can we tell ourselves with conviction that we have utilised all the opportunities we had with commitment to take India out of the club of the poor? Who is responsible for our failures on the political front and providing the space for divisive elements to make headway in our national life? Can we absolve ourselves of our failures in achieving the desired result of the full empowerment of the socially backward sections? Caste-based social stratification is a reality we have not been able to address in nearly six decades of freedom. Similarly, gender-based discrimination is yet another major crucial social issue we have failed in addressing. How long shall we wait for our women who constitute almost fifty per cent of our population to have an effective share in the political decision-making processes, especially in our representative institutions? When are we going to take the benefit of education to nearly five hundred million more of our citizens? When are we going to provide drinking water to nearly half a million more of our villages? What meaning do information and communications technologies have for those thousands of our villages where electricity and telephones are yet to reach? When are we going to ensure good medical care and good road connectivity to all our villages? Who will provide jobs to the millions of unemployed in our country? Above all, and most fundamental of them all, is the question of when are we going to redeem the plight of the nearly 350 million of our citizens who live below the poverty line. The question of this mass poverty is still staring at the conscience of free India today. The freedom as some people enjoy has no meaning for all those unfortunate citizens who still live unsure of their next square meal.

These are the challenges before the nation today. These are the challenges that our political leadership and the civil society will have to address together if we want to make our freedom meaningful for all of our citizens and if we have to make our constitutional provisions living ones. For this, it is imperative that we pool in all our national assets and our collective strength. The energy and resources that we have been wasting on emotive and divisive issues should be channelised towards nation-building efforts.

In the ultimate analysis, the test of a country's strength and success lies in its ability to take suitable measures to redress the peoples' grievances and to take the country forward in all senses of the term, so that the common people, particularly the weakest sections of our people, derive the benefit of development. There should be a commitment to achieve the goals laid down in the Constitution.

The constitutional provisions and the laws made thereunder are required to be implemented with commitment to serve people for whom they are meant. The resources of the country and the development that takes place cannot be arrogated by small sections of the people for themselves. We must develop the culture of working together. Fight against forces of disruption, obscurantism and fundamentalism, and against poverty and disease and against exploitation may be long drawn but can be won if we have enlightened leadership, principled commitment and disciplined approach.

The aberrations that have crept into our socio-political systems can be tackled effectively only if our youth, especially those who have the benefit of higher education, come forward with dedication and commitment. Our youth are the true sentinels of our democracy. A democratic society can be sustained only by responsible citizens who are capable and willing to contribute to the common cause. For the success of democracy, therefore, along with the expansion of education, we should facilitate democratic values to pervade every aspect of our national life. If we want to be a great nation, we must train our young men and women into becoming responsible citizens, ever ready to shoulder national responsibilities.

To my young friends here, I would like to remind once again that the destiny of a nation is built upon the character of its citizens in the shaping of which education plays an important role. Whether it is in public life or in student life, we cannot reach great heights if we lack in character. The graduates who are passing out of this University should consider themselves, to be among the privileged few amongst the people of India. They must always pursue excellence in life, advance knowledge and communicate it to the masses and work for strengthening our democracy.

Our freedom fighters made tremendous sacrifices in their fight against the imperialist forces for the political as well as economic emancipation of the country and the people. During the decades, since Independence, we have undoubtedly made considerable progress in various sectors. Our young men and women, boys and girls overcoming severe handicaps have attained great proficiency in several fields. Our scientists have also made significant achievements, their efficiency and calibre are well-acknowledged. In higher and technical education, there have been significant achievements. There has been increase in gross domestic product. We have been able to maintain our parliamentary system of democracy, in spite of several aberrations and distortions. However, our achievements so far have been mostly for the benefit of only limited section of the people.

Those people who deserve to receive their entitlements under the Constitution are waiting for long. Communalism, secessionism, corruption and divisiveness are anathema to the letter and spirit of our Constitution and only united national endeavour can assure to the people what is justly due to them. Our former President, Dr. K.R. Narayanan has very pertinently observed that there is no defect in our Constitution and our non-achievement in various sectors is due to the manner in which and by the people by whom the country has been governed.

Who will provide this leadership and who can have that commitment and discipline but for our students and youth who have vision and the capability to take this country forward and remove the ills which we are suffering from. That is why, I call upon the youth and particularly the students to take part more in public affairs, so that we can have their proper participation in the democratic process and for the governance of this country. To my mind, for the present, there is no alternative to parliamentary democracy as the system of governance of our country. The Parliament is the highest Constitutional body in our country. It represents the people who choose their representatives and enforce the accountability of the Government through the House of People. Through Parliament, a Council of Ministers is chosen and under the Constitution it is responsible to the House of People. Unless more and more articulate and dedicated youth come forward to take part in our system of governance, it will be difficult to reach our goals. The community which has invested in providing education and giving training to our students can surely expect a return, so that we can have a strong resurgent, secular, progressive and a modern India of our dreams where there will be no discrimination between people and people, no denial of people's rights and entitlements and no one who will have to depend on other's charity to survive. I am sure the students of this great University will respond in full measure.

Remember that the future does not belong to those who are content with today, indifferent towards common problems and their fellow man alike, timid and fearful in the face of new ideas and bold initiatives. It will belong to those who are ever receptive to new ideas and are willing to experiment with them in the interest of the world around them. It is this quality that I would expect the new graduates to carry with them when they are leaving the protective portals of their University.

Friends, a Convocation is a landmark in the lives of the students and the faculty. It is an opportunity for the University to take stock of what it has achieved and what it has to aspire for. For all those who pass out today, the coming years would open up various opportunities and at the same time present numerous challenges. Only with total commitment and dedication to the causes with which you get to associate in the years ahead will you be able to make a mark on the society around you. It is in your ability to make that mark that the meaning, the content and the quality of the valuable years that you have spent in this great institution of higher learning will have to be demonstrated. I hope the scholars will work hard to secure a bright future for themselves and for the country and by remaining firmly committed to certain ideals, by staying on the path of truth, justice and probity, fighting against social evils, and by dedicating themselves to the service of the nation, they all will strive to make a difference to the world around them.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the University of North Bengal once again for according me the opportunity to associate myself with this Convocation. I hope this University will continue to produce responsible, confident, disciplined and socially sensitive citizens who will become instruments in strengthening our democratic edifice. I convey my best wishes to one and all.

Thank you.

I am happy to have this opportunity to associate myself with this National Meet to exchange our views on the issues and problems confronting the North Eastern Region. Having been born in Assam, I have a special affinity for the States of this very important region of our country.

It is unfortunate that still many people in the rest of India are not fully aware of the issues and problems of the North Eastern region. Wide ethnic, religious and cultural diversities exist in this region, which are reflected in the fact that there are over 200 tribes speaking as many as 92 languages/ dialects. It is the existence of such wide variety and distinctiveness that add colour to our national milieu. But cutting across these diversities is the strong undercurrent of unity which makes the composite nationality of India.

As you know in the colonial days, the North-Eastern region was very loosely administered and allowed to keep its distinctive customs, traditions and life styles for strategic reasons of the foreign rulers.

The entire region got isolated from the rest of the country in the wake of partition, leading to myriad problems and difficulties both for the people living in the area and to the Central Government. The age-old natural and economic linkage of the region with the rest of the country was cut off, with only the Siliguri passage forming a vital corridor linking the region with the rest of India. Partition greatly put back the economy of much of the region as it lost its markets, transit routes and arteries of communication and the main port city, Chittagong, to become an all but land-locked 'pocket of India'. Costs sky-rocketed, especially on account of tortuously long transportation routes, and economic opportunities shrunk as a result of market loss. The present surface route from Agartala to Kolkata is about 1500 kms. whereas the actual transit route between these important centres before partition through the present Bangladesh was only 300 kms. Today, the region is surrounded by four other countries, sharing between them 5,000 kms. of international boundary.

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* At the inauguration of the National Meet on *A Dialogue on North-East*, New Delhi (2 March 2005).

Most of the separate States of the region were created during the post-Independence period, in the sixties, seventies and eighties, mainly to fulfil the ethnic, political and cultural aspirations of the dominant tribal groups of the region. It unfortunately has a troubled legacy of alienation and insurgency, both accentuated, because of uneven development. The States as a result have been adversely affected and have continued to lag behind the rest of the country. The complex ethnic mosaic has its own complexities related to problems of tribal relationships. To this has been added the far-reaching and more often negative consequences of illegal infiltration from across the borders. The discontent, frustration and insecurity which have built up among the original inhabitants require immediate and effective attention.

The most serious problem in the region is the existing large-scale unemployment, especially among the educated youth which has substantially aggravated the problem of insurgency. Infrastructure deficiency has been a major problem of the whole region. It is evident that the benefits of development have not percolated to the region for a long time. On the one hand, the general backwardness and the infrastructural deficiencies of the region affected foreign investment and, on the other, lack of security is discouraging domestic entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are not willing to invest in insurgency-ridden States. It has become a vicious circle and accentuates the problem of under-development and unemployment and thereby acts as a spiral to militancy.

In their 36th report, focusing on the problem of insurgency in the North-East, presented to Parliament on 26 February 1997, the Departmentally Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs emphasized the need for a two-pronged strategy for the region dealing with insurgency on the one hand and working for the development on the other. The Committee recognized that the problem of insurgency in the region is a national problem and as such needs to be tackled accordingly, demonstrating the readiness to make the necessary sacrifices by the whole country.

There has been a general recognition at different levels that the issues facing the North-East need to be taken up collectively by the States of the region with the active involvement of the Central Government. Several initiatives flowed from this recognition. You know about the special constitutional provisions, the establishment of the North Eastern Council in 1971 by an Act of Parliament, creation of a separate Central Ministry exclusively to look after the North-Eastern Region, etc. Successive Prime Ministers have announced special economic and developmental packages for the region. These are over and above the mandatory requirement that all Ministries of the Government of India earmark 10 per cent of their Annual Plan expenditure for the North Eastern Region. The substantial support

provided to the State Plans of the region is already well known and if I may say so, on a per-capita basis, the Central investment is an impressive one. However, there are still road-blocks hampering the processes of peace and development in the region.

It is, therefore, imperative for the Government, the leaders, the people and their representatives to make concerted efforts to bring back those influenced by the cult of violence, into the mainstream of our society. Everyone involved has to realize that violence and democracy cannot co-exist. Movements which are instrumental in depriving ordinary citizens of their fundamental right to life and liberty cannot claim any place in a civilized society. What this region needs today, more than anything else, is the right atmosphere for development. The role of the Government is that of a facilitator and it has to deal with the situation with sympathy and understanding and nothing should be done to alienate the people in any manner. But unless the people of the region discard violence as a means for achieving political objectives, no developmental initiatives will produce the desired results. Our country offers many opportunities for progress and development which should not be lost by divisive feelings.

Here I would specially like to commend the initiative of Prof. Indira Goswami to bring ULFA to the negotiating table and act as a bridge with the Government. We need more such initiatives from concerned citizens, traditional institutions and the Government. The trends in Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura are equally heartening.

The North Eastern Region also demonstrates certain positive developmental indices. The literacy rates in the States of the region have been generally much higher than the national average. Most North Eastern States have registered a much greater women's work participation rate than the all India average. Women in the region enjoy a higher social status than in many other parts of the country. The agro-climatic conditions in the region also hold out immense potential for a variety of annual and perennial crops, including horticultural and plantation crops.

Those who are nurturing parochial, communal, chauvinistic and separatist sentiments should remember that India is a land of diversities. Religious, linguistic, regional and cultural plurality is a fact of life in India. It is a basic characteristic of the Indian society, which has to survive, if India as a nation is to survive. Our plurality is best sustained under a democratic order. The Founding Fathers of our Republic had taken care to accommodate and sustain the diversities of all kinds and to address the peculiarities of each region and group in the country.

There is enormous untapped developmental potential in the region which has to be exploited to the benefit of the people of the region. We also have to ensure that the agencies and instruments, established to facilitate good governance and development, discharge their responsibilities with commitment and transparency.

It goes to the credit of the leaders and the people of the region that in spite of the efforts of divisive elements to wean away the people from the national mainstream, the people of the North-East have defeated such elements and have consistently reaffirmed their commitment to the country and to its basic unity. With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate this National Meet. I am sure this Meet will provide an opportunity to comprehensively look at these States and their problems and come up with effective suggestions to address them.

Thank you.

HOMOEOPATHY: A VIABLE ALTERNATE SYSTEM OF MEDICINE*

I am very happy to be present here today at the inauguration of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH). I am thankful to Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss and his Ministry for giving me this opportunity to associate with your Jubilee Celebrations.

It is known that the CCRH has undertaken various activities by initiating, aiding, developing and coordinating scientific research in different aspects of Homoeopathy. Promoting and assisting institutions of research for the study of diseases, their prevention, causes and remedy and exchanging information with other institutions, associations and societies interested in the objectives similar to those of the Central Council, etc. have been part of your endeavours. I take this opportunity to compliment all of you on the good work you have been engaged in during the last two-and-a-half decades.

West Bengal, has a very long-standing relationship with Homoeopathy. Ever since some German Missionaries first introduced Homoeopathy in Kolkata in 1810, the City has become the cradle of Homoeopathy. As early as in 1868, the Homoeopathic journal, the *Calcutta Journal of Medicine* was published from there. The first Homoeopathic College, the Calcutta Homoeopathic Medical College, was founded in 1881. In 1941, the Bengal Government accorded official status to Homoeopathy and constituted the first Central Council and State Faculty of Homoeopathy. It was thus befitting that the Government of India established the National Institute of Homoeopathy in Kolkata in 1975.

There have been a number of leading Homoeopathic physicians in Kolkata who had achieved great renown. Recently, we have lost unfortunately one of its stalwarts, Dr. Bholanáth Chakraborty. I take this opportunity to pay my tributes to his memory. Today, millions of people in our country look up to Homoeopathy for cost-effective, and at the same time, efficient treatment. The ever-increasing figures, about 180 Homoeopathic Colleges and over two lakh Homoeopathic practitioners in the country — the highest in the world — show how well India and its people have adopted Homoeopathy.

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* At the inauguration of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy, Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi (20 March 2005).

It is one of the primary duties of a welfare State to provide adequate health-care to its citizens. Obviously, no State can be wedded to any one particular system of medicine in improving the health status of its citizens. Any system of medicine that ameliorates the sufferings of the people and at the same time within their financial means, deserves our patronage and support. Homoeopathy has stood this test. The use of Homoeopathy has increased globally and large parts of the world, particularly Europe and Asia, are witnessing a substantial growth. In countries like India, Brazil, Mexico, etc., Homoeopathy is integrated in the health-care systems.

All branches of medicine should address the varieties of diseases and ailments affecting the people in different parts of the world. Today, when the conventional Western medicines in many respect are raising questions about their side-effects, prohibitive cost and intrusive and invasive technology, we have to endeavour towards improving the awareness of alternative systems of medicine. Homoeopathy has an important place among them. Homoeopathy has great merits and should be able to treat, particularly, communicable and infectious diseases and life-style disorders, which are on the rise today.

The success of Homoeopathic treatment depends not only on the skill of the physicians but also on the purity and the quality of medicines administered to the patients. The manufacturers and the profession have to pool their resources and carry out further research in this regard.

Friends, health and education, along with productive employment, are essential for a meaningful life. One of the major challenges before countries like India is to provide inexpensive and effective medical care to the people, especially in the villages. The demographic and health picture of our country is still a cause for grave concern to all of us. It is, therefore, necessary that we do everything possible to ensure that safer and cheaper drugs required for common ailments are within the reach of all at affordable prices. We must make the best use of all the available medical skills of all branches of medicine for this.

It should be remembered that our people have access to the alternative systems of medicine like Homoeopathy, Ayurveda and Unani which have helped our health care scenario in a significant way. Homoeopathy and our other traditional systems of medicine are holistic ones and deal with human health in a physically, mentally and psychologically integrated manner.

Keeping in view our socio-economic and developmental conditions, we have to produce medical practitioners who are equipped to meet the basic health problems of our people. Perhaps with a little more encouragement to our own traditional systems and by making use of the large number of

homoeopathic doctors, many of our primary health care problems can be addressed. We should be able to take the benefits of modern medicines to the people across the country. As such, it is important that those trained in the different branches of medicine should not feel inhibited about working in the villages where their presence is more required than in the cities, as a vast majority of our people still live in villages.

I understand that Homoeopathy is rich in preventive medicines also. But because of the poor infrastructural facilities, inadequate input into research and lack of proper patronage, our people are not able to take full advantage of it. Our changing lifestyles and dietary habits are causing increasing incidence of several diseases such as diabetes, blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, etc. Our doctors need to study the underlying causes of these diseases and pay special attention to their early detection. There should be more emphasis on preventing the occurrence of various ailments instead of merely curing them. Doctors need to keep in touch with the latest medical developments and researches to help and heal their patients faster.

Our large pool of qualified Homoeopathic practitioners enjoys high local acceptance and respect and, consequently, exerts considerable influence on health beliefs and practices of the people. They can also play a significant role in popularizing the small family norm among their vast clientele.

Similarly, the Homoeopathic profession should also look at how best they can be meaningfully involved in the implementation of our various National Health Programmes. I am happy to note that the Council has taken up clinical evaluation of certain diseases that are common as well as chronic ailments and also in certain diseases of interest from the national health point of view like filaria, malaria, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, etc. The Council, I understand, is doing work on other areas of drug standardization, collection and cultivation of medicinal plants and literary research. I convey my best wishes for the success of your endeavours and of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy, which I have great pleasure in inaugurating.

Thank you.

MAULANA AZAD'S VISION OF EDUCATION*

It gives me great pleasure to associate myself with the presentation of the prestigious Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Literacy Awards for promoting education among the educationally backward minorities. At the outset, I would like to pay my tributes to the memory of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who distinguished our national life by his varied contributions in diverse fields, and more particularly, as Independent India's first Union Minister of Education. I also commend the Maulana Azad Foundation for their praiseworthy endeavours towards promoting education among the educationally backward minority communities.

Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate the winners of the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Literacy Awards for the year 2005 — the Marwar Muslim Educational Society, Jodhpur; the Maharashtra Cosmopolitan Education Society, Pune; and the Farook College, Calicut. These institutions have played a vital role in promoting education amongst the minorities, who deserve all attention and better facilities for their educational advancement.

It is undoubtedly a recognition, rather an honour for these institutions to be the recipients of this Award instituted after Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who himself was an erudite scholar, renowned educationist and reputed administrator. I am happy that the Government has taken the initiative for instituting an Award of this nature at the national level, extending recognition for commendable work in promoting literacy among the educationally backward minorities in the country. Conferment of this Award in the name of such an illustrious national leader, who had dedicated his life to the cause of a united, progressive and secular India, will spur them on to achieve greater heights in their endeavours and help the cause of the educational development of the minorities.

Friends, among the patriots and heroes of our freedom movement, Maulana Azad occupies a distinctive position. The President of the Indian National Congress during the final stages of our struggle, he along with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, constituted the 'famous trio' who carried out the negotiations leading to Freedom, and later of laying the foundations of a new Republic on secular-socialist lines. He was one of

* At the function to give away the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Literacy Awards, New Delhi (21 March 2005).

the greatest protagonists of Hindu-Muslim unity in the country. No one those days could match his understanding of history and his persuasive arguments in support of composite nationalism and a united nation. He desired that the foundations of modern India be on the strength of Hindu-Muslim unity. On his first election, as the Congress President in 1923, at the young age of 35, he said:

> If an angel were to descend from the high heavens and proclaim from the heights of the Qutab Minar: 'Discard Hindu-Muslim Unity and within 24 hours Swaraj is yours', I will refuse Swaraj but will not budge an inch from my stand. If Swaraj is delayed it will affect only India, while the end of our unity will be the loss of our entire human world.

He repeated similar sentiments on his re-election as the Congress President in 1940, at a crucial juncture in the country's history:

> Eleven hundred years of common history (between Hindus and the Muslims) have enriched India with our common achievements. Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs ... everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavour.... The thousand years of our joint life has moulded us into a common nationality. This cannot be done artificially. Nature does her fashioning through her hidden processes in the course of centuries ... Whether we like it or not we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. No fantasy or artificial scheming to separate and divide can break this unity. We must accept the logic of fact and history and engage ourselves in the fashioning of our future destiny.

Friends, it is well-known that as Education Minister, Maulana Azad strove towards making the educational policies, an instrument for developing India's human resources in the fullest sense. He saw in education the tool for human beings to realize their potential and for their moral and intellectual development and the refinement of their aesthetic sensibilities. He felt that the educational system, particularly higher educational system, should play an important role in preparing the youth for the exciting task of the socio-economic transformation of the country.

He was endowed with tremendous intellectual and mental capacities. The intellectual and literary circles had, in fact, claimed him to be 'belonging to their tribe'. With his eminence and erudition, he provided effective leadership to the ministry he headed. Besides concretizing the educational policy and initiating various plans and programmes in this field, he gave impetus and encouragement for the development of art, literature, cultural

activities as also scientific research. The setting up of the Secondary Education Commission of 1952 and the University Grants Commission, the re-organisation of the All India Council of Technical Education, the establishment of various scientific laboratories and the Indian Institutes of Technology all owe in no small measure to the initiatives taken by Maulana Azad.

Friends, there are many lessons to be learnt from Maulana Azad's life and his endeavours if we have to surmount the challenges before us. As he rightly emphasized more than five decades back, the first priority in front of us is universalisation of education which, regrettably, is the case even today. With over a billion population, our human resource is indeed remarkable. However, the distressing scenario is that we have a substantial section of our population which is still illiterate. In sheer numbers, this illiteracy clouds all our claim to be a developed country.

In this context, if we have to fully realize the potential of our human resources, it is absolutely imperative that no section of society is left out of our literacy campaigns. Particular attention should be paid to the educationally backward regions and States, to the minority communities, weaker sections, women, etc., who have suffered for historical and other socio-economic reasons. Our rural areas and villages should be the focal point for such emancipation. Empowerment emanates from education. In today's knowledge-driven society, if you are not literate and educated, you cannot access the benefits of empowerment. So, our literacy endeavours should encompass inclusiveness and empowerment in their varied manifestations.

In this context, I strongly feel that it is all the more important to pay special attention to promoting education amongst the educationally backward minorities, an aspect on which Maulana Azad laid particular emphasis. Unfortunately, the spread of education as well as the standard of education among some minority communities have not been very satisfactory, for historical and other reasons. This inadequacy is a matter of serious concern because it has a direct bearing on their socio-economic and even political status.

The State needs to make special efforts and perspective planning on affirmative action to make our educational system more inclusive, leaving out none from its orbit. For this, we have to launch an all-out campaign involving community leaders, the civil society, the media — both print and electronic — and those from the community who have already benefited from education and productive employment. Permit me to reiterate that the social, economic and political emancipation of the minority communities can come about only through their educational emancipation.

In this regard, I would stress that the recent constitutional amendment which made the right to education a Fundamental Right is a commendable step towards achieving universalisation of education. This amendment also puts an onus on both the State and the parents to ensure that the children go to schools. What is important, however, is that the intent of this amendment cannot be realized unless and until specific action is taken by all concerned, especially in respect of the educationally backward communities.

Maulana Azad, during his illustrious stewardship of the Education Ministry, also endeavoured ceaselessly to inculcate moral and social values in our educational system. He realized the imperative of education as a means to secure social equity, education as a great leveller and integrator, education as a medium to strengthen our secular fabric. All these, to my mind, are more relevant today than ever before. W.B. Yeats wrote: 'Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire'. We have to ignite the passion and the creative energies of our younger generations to build a modern, secular and developed India. And education, as the vehicle of social change, is of immense significance in that endeavour.

During his first meeting with the senior officers of the Ministry of Education immediately after he took over as the Minister, Maulana Azad spoke of his vision for India, and the cardinal role of education in realizing that vision. He said:

> Education, science and culture have a unique role to play in making the new India of our dreams, with its rich composite culture, its precious unity in the midst of valuable diversities, its overall national integrity, its abiding values of truth, justice and tolerance, and its unique capacity to synthesize the cultures of the East and the West into a new and creative blend that preserves the best of the past, along with the eager pursuit of all, work together to eradicate illiteracy and ignorance, sloth and poverty, so that our country can take its rightful place in the comity of nations.

Today, more than five decades down the lane, we are yet to realize fully the India of Maulana Azad's dreams. But the endeavours and achievements of institutions like the Muslim Educational Society, Jodhpur; the Maharashtra Cosmopolitan Education Society, Pune; and the Farook College, Calicut, give us hope and also inspiration. I once again congratulate them and wish them the very best in the years ahead.

Thank you.

TOWARDS POPULATION STABILIZATION: ROLE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE*

I am greatly honoured to be here today to deliver the Ninth JRD Tata Memorial Oration on the important subject, *Towards Population Stabilization: Role of Good Governance*. I am grateful to the Population Foundation of India for giving me this opportunity to speak on a theme which was very close to JRD Tata's heart. At the outset, I would like to pay my humble tributes to the memory of the doyen of Indian industry who was also a pioneering crusader for the promotion of family planning and welfare in our country.

Late JRD Tata was indeed a multi-faceted personality — a visionary, a pioneer, a creator of wealth who laid the foundation of Indian industry, a builder of institutions, a social activist with great sensitivity and, above all, a fine human being, who became a legend in his own life-time. He actively promoted and assiduously fostered several causes in the service of the nation. Of utmost priority to him was the need to put a check on our rapidly rising population. JRD, as he was affectionately called by his friends and admirers, advocated population stabilization not only as an instrument of curbing the exponentially rising population of India but also to secure for our people a new meaning of life and thus enjoy the fruits of progress and development. His view of the gravity of the crisis was reflected in his utmost concern in addressing the problem of poverty and protecting the environment which, he felt, were wider dimensions of the population crisis. He called upon successive Governments to confront these challenges on a high priority basis. JRD also stressed how important it was to ensure good governance practices in enabling development and population stabilization. It was at his initiative that the International Institute of Population Studies was set up in 1956 to study the related issues in perspective and provide inputs in meeting the grave situation. JRD's ceaseless endeavours in population stabilization saw him being honoured with the 1992 UN Population Award. He articulated his concerns in his acceptance speech thus:

> I was motivated by nothing more important than a kind of personal protest against the continuing poverty of most of our people which

* At the Ninth JRD Tata Memorial Oration on *Towards Population Stabilization: Role of Good Governance*, New Delhi (30 March 2005).

had deprived them for so long of even minimum acceptable conditions of living and, in the process, had undermined all efforts at raising the nation's socio-economic development. The subject became a personal obsession which still haunts me.

It is highly gratifying to see that his other brainchild, the Population Foundation of India, has been doing outstanding work towards population stabilization and establishing a balance among our resources, environment and population and in different areas relating to population policy, namely, universal primary health care, including reproductive and child health services, empowering women, involving communities and so on.

The subject of today's talk has two specific components — population stabilization and good governance. Indeed, these are closely inter-related, especially in the context of a country like India. We cannot facilitate good governance in all its manifestations unless we make concrete efforts towards population stabilization; at the same time, good governance has a very crucial role in stabilizing the growth of our population apart from providing amenities and opportunities to them. For a country like India with over a billion population — and we are still growing exponentially — we need both population stabilization and good governance in good measure. And that to be achieved, it is imperative that all stakeholders should take proactive measures to facilitate the related processes. The thrust should be on making the various components of good governance practices work cohesively as a means to stabilizing our population.

The concern for population stabilization and good governance, indeed, must become the concern of all — whether we are part of the governing structures of the country or outside. Statistics speak a tale of their own: as to how we are adding to our population — rather the world population — by seconds, minutes and hours. As experts in the field, you are all fully aware of the related facts, figures and terminologies. What we need to keep in mind is that India is the second most populous country in the world, sustaining 16.7 per cent of the global population on 2.4 per cent of the earth's surface area.

It may be contended that high population growth is to a certain extent inevitable, especially during the early stages of demographic transition; what is important, however, is to facilitate the acceleration of the pace of such demographic transition. The issue is how to transform our population into an asset, converting our human potential into a high value added workforce resource for contributing towards raising the standards of living of the entire population in a sustainable manner. These aspects should be kept in mind while discussing the role of the State in achieving the goal of population stabilization through appropriate good governance policies and programmes.

The issue of population is complex and varied and it has many facets. It was used as an excuse for colonialism, as an explanation for colonial famines, as an explanation for poverty in all countries, especially Third World countries. Thus, civil wars in Africa, refugee flows, 'war for water', etc. are all attributed by some to population growth. It, however, does not explain the continuing, and increasing, transfer of resources from the poor countries to the rich ones, which only points to the fact that the so called 'less' or 'optimally' populated countries are not able to run their affairs with their own resources and, conversely, even the over-populated countries do have resources to be spared. This makes it imperative to talk not so much of numbers as of consumption. But the focus in many circles is still with the numbers, which only explains part of the issue.

Of course, no one can suggest that birth control is unnecessary or unimportant. On the contrary, measures for birth control have been an extremely important part of the global — and indeed Indian women's — struggles for equality and justice. As has been observed by an analyst, 'we do not need family planning for neo-Malthusian reasons, for economic development or for the good of the country, but we do need it for widening women's freedoms. We also need it for the well-being of children, indeed for the well-being of people, precisely for the same reasons people need health services.'

It was rightly recognized in the formative years of our Republic that freedom from foreign rule would be incomplete without freedom from want, deprivation and destitution. As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar rightly pointed out, 'political democracy would have no meaning without social justice and economic uplift of all sections of society'. It was this realization which made Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stress:

> We have to come to grips with this problem of population. It does not become some kind of a theoretical concept. We have to plan in terms of food, clothing, housing, education, health, work, etc., and we realise that some kind of limitation of the rapidly growing population becomes an urgent matter for us. ... the most vital thing in India is for us to advance on the economic and social fronts. If in our eagerness for family planning we ignore this major aspect of economic advance or educational advance, we will be building on wholly insecure foundations. For economic and educational progress is the only foundation on which we can have any effective progress in regard to family planning.

Thus, emphasis was laid on food, shelter and clothing as important components of the country's developmental process. That we were fully conscious of the seriousness of the situation is evident from the fact that India was the first country in the world to formulate a National Family

Planning Programme, as early as in 1952. The Five Year Plans formulated since 1952 have also been addressing the concerns of the population growth. The First Five Year Plan itself underlined the need for population stabilization thus:

> The recent increase in the population of India and the pressures exercised on the limited resources of the country have brought to the forefront the urgency of the problem of family planning and population control. ... It is, therefore, apparent that population control can be achieved only by the reduction of the birth rate to the extent necessary to stabilize the population at a level consistent with the requirements of the national economy. This can be secured only by the realization of the need for family limitation on a wide scale by the people.

Over the last five decades, successive Governments have come out with various schemes, policies and programmes to confront the challenge of population growth. We had taken steps for promoting economic development by integrating the population aspect also into the planning processes. The Third Five Year Plan clearly put the population issue at the centre of planned development, with greater emphasis on changing the attitude of the people. The Fourth Five Year Plan emphasized that the benefits of economic development could be passed on to the people only if the population was controlled. During the Ninth Plan period, the emphasis shifted to decentralized planning at the district level based on an assessment of community needs and the implementation of related programmes. Some of the major concerns, during this period, were to reduce the rate of population growth by meeting the need for contraception, and reducing the infant and maternal mortality. It is also due to intensified efforts to enhance the quality and coverage of family welfare services that we could achieve declining trends in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) or the average number of births per couple.

Even though we had an early start at family planning, we have not been successful enough in putting a check on the rapid rise of our population. Between 1947 and 2001, there has been a trebling of India's population. Much money was spent, many programmes announced and put into operation; in between, we graduated from family planning to family welfare and from population control to population stabilization. We also witnessed a critical phase of these efforts during the days of the internal emergency. In the eighties and the nineties, there was a greater awareness of the extent and gravity of the problem, corresponding to the global campaign for population control and stabilization. But, in real terms, these efforts have not curbed our population growth as is evident from the fact that we are fast catching up on China and are set to overtake our northern neighbour by 2040.

Notwithstanding the trend of the declining fertility rates, our falling infant mortality and increasing life expectancy will spur an increase of at least 300 million people by 2020. According to the Planning Commission projection, the total population of India will exceed 1.3 billion in 2020. A marked slowdown in birth rates will leave the under-15 population at roughly the same size as it is today. It goes to show that the pressure for expansion of the educational system will come from increasing enrolment in our educational institutions. The population over 60 years of age is estimated to double from 60 to 120 million people and the Government will be duty bound to adopt special measures to support the vulnerable group, which will include a high percentage of illiterates who are also susceptible to both malnutrition and health-related problems. Unless we take appropriate action, we may have to face a great challenge posed by unequal rates of population and economic growth, which is likely to further aggravate the regional disparities within the country.

A number of factors have to be addressed when we talk of population stabilization in our country. These include, besides the size of our population, various political, social and economic consequences of such unbridled growth. India is pluralistic in more ways than one — political, climatic, linguistic, religious and many more. Development itself has been lopsided across the Indian landmass. In the years since Independence, economic iniquities have widened — within the country as a whole and more importantly within individual States. We find islands of affluence surrounded by poverty, privation and penury. The social and economic costs of such dichotomy in development have been enormous, putting considerable strain on the nation and its governance structure. We see the consequences all around us — poverty; youth unrest; unemployment; lack of educational infrastructure; conflicts between the landlords and the landless; pitiable conditions of women, children, the working class; migration from rural to urban centres, putting further pressure on the already strained civic infrastructure; crime and violence; adverse impact on the environment; strain on the available land and resources, inadequate health care facilities, etc. We also have to confront issues like shortage of clean drinking water, electricity, food, problems related to pollution, sanitation, hygiene, waste management, etc. All these issues have to be confronted and resolved not only for the sake of our polity and society but for the economy as well. In spite of our economy growing fast, the economic and social investment required to support our present population would thus have to be highly substantial.

One has to keep in mind that there are sizeable inter-State differences in population, population growth rates and the time by which the TFR of 2.1 and population stabilization will be achieved. There is an emergent need to narrow down these disparities among the States; otherwise, it will have a

major impact on the health and nutritional status of their population, education and skill development, employment and emoluments of the people, rural-urban and inter-State migrations, and above all, on social and economic development. In fact, it has been assessed that the performance of the more populous States of Rajasthan, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar would determine the year and size of population at which India achieves the replacement level of fertility. We need to make special efforts during the next two decades to break the vicious circle of poor performance, poor per capita income, poverty, low literacy and high birth rate for preventing the widening of disparities as between the States.

A rational population policy and an appropriate development strategy will have to be synchronised. We cannot ignore the fact that uncontrolled growth of population has detrimental implications for development plans, aggravating the problems of food supply, nutrition and employment and, above all, hampering our efforts in ensuring a decent and dignified life to our people. A perceptive population policy should be an essential component of the overall development programme; otherwise in the limited resource situation that we are faced with, the population factor is bound to disturb the social, economic and political life of the country as well as its governance. Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze have warned us about the 'compounding' of the impact of population increase and economic growth. They have pointed out thus:

> ... There is a compounding of the impact of population growth and economic growth to which we have to pay attention. Even when the impact of population growth today happens to be small, if we consider the long-run effects of today's population expansion in the light of prospective prosperity in the future, we have to take into account compounded aggregate effects that can be quite large and are likely to grow over time. ... In all the spheres of concern to which we have already referred (food and nutritional adequacy, environmental degradation, infrastructural pressure, etc.) we have to look at the cumulative effects of growth in population size and increase in economic activity.

Many people often link population growth and related problems to food sufficiency in a simplistic manner. JRD Tata cautioned us long back about this when he said: 'There has, in the past, been an extraordinary reluctance to consider the population problem at all or an equally dangerous tendency to oversimplify it by relating it only to food production. Even if the latter could be made to keep pace indefinitely with the rise in our population, the problem would be solved only in part because even the poorest of our people are not likely to be satisfied for long merely with a sufficiency of food.'

The country has made significant strides in food production. However, in spite of progress, nearly half of our population still suffers from chronic under-nutrition and malnutrition. The most vulnerable among them are children, women and the elderly from the low-income groups. Linked with this is the question of generation of sufficient employment opportunities, which has to be worked out as part of a strategy for national food security as food security is an essential requirement for raising the level of productivity of our work force.

I believe that equal access to gainful employment, which is a constitutional right, has to be backed by the full commitment of the Government. While it is likely that the population growth slows down to replacement levels over the next two decades, our greatest challenge will be to provide employment opportunities for all the job seekers. According to the Planning Commission's estimates, it is likely that the working age group population will expand by about 45 per cent, leading to a rapid growth of the working people and the number of job seekers. To meet the situation, India will need to generate around 200 million additional jobs over the next twenty years. Thus, a major thrust of our economic policy should be ensuring generation of employment opportunities for such additional requirements.

We also have to seriously work out national development strategies that can achieve sustainable and equitable human development and empower people. We should go beyond social safety nets and focus directly on providing jobs and raising incomes of the marginalised sections of society, through explicit policy interventions. We need to frame and implement public policies that enable income generation and facilitate equitable distribution especially to benefit the poor and the vulnerable.

Measures should also be taken to improve the process of governance with the objective that our public policy fundamentally protects the general public interest, especially the interests of the weaker sections of society. One need hardly stress that human development and good governance should go hand in hand. The real challenge before any society is to create a system of governance which would be capable of promoting, supporting and sustaining human development to realize the highest potential and well-being of all by eliminating poverty and all other forms of exclusion. In the process of strengthening the foundations of democracy, we should ensure that the core characteristics of good governance, which besides ensuring participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness and consensus-orientation also encompass in their fold equity, effectiveness and efficiency, and a strategic vision. Our strategies for human development must aim at generating economic growth, productive employment, social integration and environmental regeneration as also ensuring extensive public participation and empowerment of the

vulnerable groups. The public needs to be involved more purposively in the process of policy formulation and their participation in the action programmes must be encouraged at all levels.

It is in the fitness of things that decentralized planning and programme implementation has been made one of the strategic themes of the National Population Policy to achieve the national socio-economic goals set for 2010. The 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts of 1992 have enabled the involvement of the local bodies in health-care, family welfare and education of the people. As the National Population Policy is to be largely implemented and managed at the Panchayat and Nagarpalika levels, we should address the issue with a comprehensive approach with multi-sectoral coordination of planning and implementation between health and family welfare schemes and include in its ambit the provision of education, nutrition, women and child development, safe drinking water, sanitation, rural and urban development and environment protection.

The increasing involvement of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in ensuring inter-sectoral coordination and community participation in planning, monitoring and management of the programmes for population stabilization, can be of great help if it is coupled with the empowerment of women, which is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of any family welfare programme. As such, the Department of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Social Welfare should take new initiatives as indeed they have already taken a few measures in training and capacity building, employment and income generation, welfare and support services. This would go a long way in economically and socially empowering women.

The focus of India's health services should be on the health care of women and children. Family limitation and spacing of children are necessary conditions, which will help to secure better health for the mother and better care and upbringing of the child. If the reproductive goals of families are fully met, the country will be able to achieve the National Population Policy goal of replacement level of fertility by 2010. Our ultimate medium and long-term goal should be to continue this process so as to accelerate the pace of demographic transition and achieve population stabilization by 2045. Early population stabilization will enable us to achieve our aim of improving the economic status and quality of life of the citizens, which is directly linked with the state of governance in any democratic set-up.

A higher level of economic development can only be the outcome of good governance practices that can help stabilize population over a period of time. I believe that by integrating our population policies into our economic and developmental strategies, we will not only be able to speed up the pace of sustainable development and poverty alleviation but we will also be able

to contribute to the achievement of our population policy objectives and ensuring an improved quality of life to our people.

Family planning measures alone are not sufficient to contain the growth of population in a country; what is more important is economic and social transformation. We have examples of several countries like Japan where the impact of their human resource development, especially education and skill development, is reflected not only in their economic growth, but also on population control. Nearer home, we have the example of Kerala where there has been a remarkable success in population stabilization which, experts assert, have been made possible because of the high rate of literacy, awareness, health-care and the like. The human development indices in Kerala are also highly commendable. States like Tamil Nadu and Goa have also been able to address the challenge of population growth to a considerable extent.

Thus, we have to fully recognize the necessity of enhancing the State's capacity to carry out new functions and redefined roles. I believe that eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability should be on top of the agenda in every country, especially in the case of India, with over a billion population to sustain.

It is essential that the gap between the rich and the poor should be narrowed down, leading to balanced development of our human wealth. Affordability of treatment and access to methods of prevention like immunization and family planning contribute to a more economically productive population. If anti-poverty strategies are linked with improved health-care for the poor with education at all age and ability levels, it will prove to be a key ingredient in reducing or even eliminating poverty. The effectiveness of anti-poverty and health-care programmes depends substantially on the efficiency and accountability of both the Union and the State Governments. The civil society also plays an important role in this regard.

The National Population Policy provides a policy framework for advancing goals and prioritizing strategies during the next decade. It is particularly important to meet the reproductive and child health needs of our people. Our health workers and health-care providers should be well equipped with the necessary skill to effectively manage the programme of comprehensive reproductive and child health-care as envisaged in the Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) Programme and the National Population Policy. If we look at some evaluation studies, we can see that the coverage under immunization is not universal even in the best performing States while coverage rates are very slow in several States.

So, it is very necessary that special efforts are made to improve access to and utilization of the services in States/Districts with high mortality or fertility rates. We also have to streamline the functioning of the primary health-care system, both in urban and rural areas, and provide good quality, integrated RCH services at the primary, secondary and tertiary care levels and improve referral services. It is highly desirable to cover the underserved population living in urban slums, remote rural and tribal areas with improved access to good quality services. It would be of great benefit if the involvement of the industry in the organized and unorganized sectors, agricultural workers and labour representatives is also sought in improving access to RCH services. A meaningful association among the community, Government and the civil society partners would help to ensure effective delivery systems at the grass-root level.

Several studies have shown that some regional and cultural factors too affect fertility patterns in different States. Even the status of women stemming from cultural factors accounts for the difference. We have a long history of social reforms in India. Besides the equality of status granted in the Constitution of India in all matters, special statutes and pronouncements have been made in national policies for the development of women. In spite of all these measures, the dominance of a patriarchal mindset has worked against securing equality of status for women and perpetuated several cultural norms that are oppressing for them.

The mindset has to change and a strong societal and political will has to emerge if we want to see the empowerment of women in the real sense. Our policies and programmes must be gender-sensitive and should also be directed to create awareness among them about their rights and responsibilities. It is equally necessary to generate a suitable environment to enable them to take decisions impinging on their health, to exercise their rights and to discharge their responsibilities. This will entail greater responsibility for all of us to see that a higher level of education is achieved not only with a focus on girls' education but for the whole population for bringing about behavioural changes in society.

It is interesting to find that several States/Districts have shown encouraging results in achieving steep reduction in mortality and fertility envisaged in the National Population Policy within the existing infrastructure and manpower. But the inadequate performance of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa could well be explained by the operation of innumerable factors requiring special attention in these States. Initially, these States, along with Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, which have been identified as Empowered Action Group (EAG) States, have been extended the facility for the preparation of area-specific programmes to

address unmet needs. The success of the EAG will depend to a large extent on how far inter-sectoral coordination has been strengthened to improve the family welfare service at the grass-roots level. We also need to ensure that Government and non-Government agencies function in harmony and provide integrated service delivery.

I believe that decentralization is necessary to help create an enabling environment for a holistic, people-centred approach and broaden local participation in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, we should keep in mind that participation is no less a social and political activity which requires awareness, organization and mobilization if it is to become an effective, reliable and predictable mechanism of decision-making and action. So, for a successful implementation of a decentralized policy, we must follow a process of gradual and strategic capacity building and trust, besides fixing our goals according to the needs and priorities for the well-being of the local population as the central guiding consideration.

It is in this context that I wish to draw attention to two factors. One, the recent efforts to bring in the two-child norm; and, two, the alarming situation of gender imbalance, that is, the Child Sex Ratio (CSR). Despite the slight overall improvement in the Sex Ratio, the CSR in India as a whole has declined significantly — from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. It is estimated that there are 35 million missing females — of all ages — in India as per the 2001 Census. A part of the declining CSR is due to continuing anti-female rates of infant and child mortality. In India, a figure of 105 male births for 100 female births is considered the norm. However, estimates for 1998 reveal an all-India figure of 111 males per 100 females. One reason may be Sex-Selective Abortion (SSA) of females.

As some studies have indicated, the decline in CSR has spread to regions and populations hitherto considered immune, namely the States of the south and west of India and populations of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Indeed, the adverse CSR has been particularly high among the Scheduled Caste population. What is also distressing is that the decline is more marked in the more developed and better-off regions and in more literate and better-off social groups. The questions that emerge are: Is population stabilization being achieved at the cost of female lives? Do punitive population policies contribute to this?

On 30 July 2003, a three-judge Bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court upheld a Haryana Government law prohibiting a person from contesting or holding the post of a *sarpanch* or *panch* in the Panchayati Raj Institutions of the State if he or she had more than two children. The Bench observed that 'disqualification on the right to contest an election for having more than two living children does not contravene any fundamental right, nor does it cross

the limits of reasonability. Rather, it is a disqualification conceptually devised in the national interest'.

Earlier, the Rajasthan High Court, hearing a similar set of petitions, in its ruling, observed: 'These provisions have been enacted by the Legislature to control the menace of population explosion. ...The Government is spending large sums of money propagating family planning. One of the agencies to which the project of family planning has been entrusted for implementation is the gram panchayat. The *panches* and *sarpanches* are to set the example and maintain the norm of two children. Otherwise what examples can they set before the public?'

In this context, it will be worthwhile to recall the Platform for Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), to which India has subscribed, which defined reproductive health as follows:

> Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore, implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide, if, when and how often to do so. Reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so and the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents. Sexual health aims to enhance life and personal relations, and not merely counselling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases.

Haryana is not the only State that has a population policy with such features, which are not only at variance with the National Population Policy, 2000 but also strike at the heart of the commitments to reproductive health and rights made by the Government at the ICPD. Other States such as Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have also provided such prescriptions in their population policies. Between them, they also advocate a host of incentives and disincentives: restricting schooling in Government schools to two children; restricting employment in public services to those with two children; restricting ration cards to two children; linking financial assistance to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for development activities and anti-poverty programmes with performance in family planning; linking assessment of public health staff to performance in family planning

and so forth. Indeed, service rules for Government employees have been altered in several States making the two-child norm mandatory.

Such approaches represent a misunderstanding of the close interaction between population and resources and can be characterised as anti-people both on fundamental and pragmatic grounds. Actually, such approaches can become counter-productive and are also demographically unnecessary. As has been argued by Dr. Mohan Rao: '...they are also morally compromised as they violate the principle of natural justice, creating two sets of citizenship rights on the basis of fertility... . Such policies represent going back to the days before universal suffrage when property rights decided citizenship claims.'

It appears that during the period of about six and a half years between the publication of the National Family Health Surveys I and II, the TFR has gone down by almost half a child. Replacement level fertility has been reached in several States. However, it is still high in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan although there is a declining trend even in these States. To achieve a sustained fertility decline, we must invest in the social sectors like health, education, employment, food and other areas, for which, unfortunately, no proper attention has been given so far. From a study of the relevant surveys, it appears that the fertility rate that is sought to be achieved is lower by about 25 per cent than the current TFR, which is 2.85 per cent. The TFR would drop to the replacement level of fertility if unwanted births can be reduced. When there is a trend of reducing fertility rate, we should consider very seriously whether punitive measures need at all to be adopted.

We should bear in mind that 'demographic transition is not merely a geographical phenomenon, but is deeply imprinted by social inequalities'. The people who are assured of steady incomes, child survival, social security, health and education have completed their demographic transition. On the other hand, vast sections of the population — particularly the dalits, the adivasis and the Other Backward Castes — who have not so benefited are lagging behind in such transition.

In view of the laws enacted by some States, linking 'the two-child norm' with the right to contest elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions, which have since received judicial endorsement, the majority of the populations in these States are, in effect, deprived of their right to contest such elections. Needless to say, this is not in consonance with and may be said to violate the spirit of the 73rd amendment to the Constitution. The largest number of cases of disqualification from contesting elections was with reference to this law. Women formed 41 per cent of those disqualified; the dalits, adivasis and the OBCs formed an overwhelming 80 per cent of those disqualified.

It is thus clear that given the strong patriarchy in the country and thus the ideology of son-preference, particularly marked in the high fertility areas of the country, a vigorous pursuit of the two-child norm is likely to have most undesirable consequences as it could degenerate into sex-selective abortions. Indeed, it was the recognition of this link that compelled the Chinese Government to officially abandon its one-child per family norm.

In fact, one of the points where the objectives of population stabilization and good governance should converge is on the need for universal education in the country, with special emphasis on the education of girl children. What is being sought to be achieved through legislative or punitive measures can be best realized through literacy. Only through education, especially in the States which are far behind in terms of reproductive health, can we bring about an attitudinal change among the large sections of the population, firstly on the social and economic implications of large families and secondly on the importance of maintaining gender balance and equity in society.

Women's education is the best means for their economic independence as also the tool for empowering them in deciding on issues like spacing child birth and for making gender-sensitive choices. In most cases of sex-selective abortions, female foeticide, and gender-discriminatory practices in the country, the women have hardly any choice. The areas that are substantially lagging behind in reproductive health and population-stabilization are also the areas that are educationally backward, particularly in female education. This is one lesson we can learn from the experience of Kerala, which is demonstrating the best indices on population-related fronts. More than anything else it is universal education that has made all the difference to Kerala on these areas.

The other factor is health-care. Over the last decade and a half, our commitment to health has unfortunately shown a decline. As the National Health Policy notes, at 0.9 per cent of GDP, India spends the fifth lowest in the world on health, less even than countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. More significantly, perhaps, India has one of the highest levels of private financing of health-care expenses, with out-of-pocket expenditure estimated to account for 87 per cent of total expenditures. Only Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Myanmar and Sierra Leone show a higher proportion of private funding.

We may compare this with 85 to 95 per cent public funding in the European countries and 45 per cent in the US. As the National Health Policy notes, medical expenditure is emerging as a leading cause of indebtedness, poor families typically cutting down on even their nutritional requirements in order to meet their health needs. We must also note the fact that India has the largest and least regulated private health-care industry in the world. Costs of both out-patient and in-patient care have increased sharply in both

rural and urban areas, compared to the mid-eighties. Thus, it is not surprising to note that the rate of decline of the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has significantly slackened in the last decade since reforms were initiated: in the decades 1971-81 and 1981-91, the percentage decline in IMR was more marked than in the period 1991-99. The percentage decline in IMR between 1971-1981 was 14.7; between 1981-91, it was even more marked at 27.3 per cent. However, in the period 1991-99, there has been a marked stagnation with the rate of decline in the IMR at 10 per cent.

At the same time, levels of hunger appear to have increased. The per capita availability of foodgrains can be deceptive. As Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen's work on the Bengal famine, among others, revealed, 'there need be no decline in per capita availability before distress or even famine occurs. Indeed, it is possible to have increasing per capita availability, with increasing levels of hunger in the population, if employment and incomes collapse'. But decreasing per capita availability, surely, cannot be matched with decreasing levels of poverty, when data also indicate that there has been decreasing employment opportunities, especially in the countryside and it is coupled with the fact that the rates of decline of IMR and Child Mortality Rate (CMR) have stagnated, and the Maternal Mortality Rate has apparently increased.

A decade after the ICPD, and five years after the National Population Policy influenced by it committed not to demographic goals, but to people's well being, it is a time for reflection and for sober stock-taking. We have to learn lessons from our past about where we have gone wrong. I have raised some issues about our failures, which may be said to be failures of governance, of policy, of priorities. One may also suggest that these are failures of the civil society, for not adequately highlighting these failures.

Friends, some components of the political system and civil society too have a crucial role in enabling good governance for a more equitable population and development strategy. I believe that the political leadership should rise to the challenge and come out with coordinated actions to facilitate population stabilization. Political parties and their leaders should mobilize public opinion in this regard and their election manifestoes should clearly place before the people their prescriptions and policies to achieve this end.

Several countries have all-party consultation groups on population issues. For example, in Australia, they have an All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development, which is a forum for discussion on population, development and reproductive health issues. We may consider constituting one such Group within our Parliament also. We should recognize the need for a consensual approach to population issues. What is of utmost import is a firm political will and political commitment to a rational and sensitive population policy.

As you know, by virtue of a constitutional amendment, we have already frozen the number of representatives in the Lok Sabha on the basis of the population at the 1971 Census levels. The freeze now stands extended up to the year 2026. I trust that this should work as an incentive to those States which are lagging behind in population stabilization rather than as a disincentive to those States which are already doing well in this regard. Trade unions, workers' associations, non-governmental organizations and other civil society stakeholders should also be involved in all our efforts at population stabilization.

Awareness generation can be enhanced through the Panchayati Raj Institutions, educational institutions, etc. The school and college curriculum should inevitably lay emphasis on the imperative of population stabilization. Community leaders should also be encouraged to motivate people towards the need for stabilizing our population and the adverse impact of the rapid population growth on the nation's socio-economic health.

The media too has a special role with its wide reach in disseminating information, creating awareness and building opinion in favour of population stabilization. Information, Education and Communication, as identified by the National Population Policy of 2000, should be key components of all our strategies. Issues like choice of contraceptives, abortion, limiting and spacing child bearing, family size preferences, economic compulsions, etc. need to be addressed as essential aspects of population stabilization and good governance. All these warrant a paradigm shift in our approach to the issues involved. In short, all our efforts should be geared to involve our population and all stakeholders as active partners in our endeavour to stabilize the population.

As I said at the beginning, we should not take an alarmist view of our population growth; we should rather try to transform our human potential into an asset. On a positive note, Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze have stressed:

> ... concern about population growth must not be simply dismissed as groundless. The size of the Indian population is already large, and its continued rapid expansion can certainly be a source of anxiety for the environment, in addition to the problems it raises for improving the living standards and economic and social well being of the people. And yet the population situation is not as terrifying as it is made to look based on the citation of selectively chosen statistics (or non-statistics). First, food supply has not been falling behind population — quite firmly to the contrary. The possibility of accommodating considerable increases in food consumption per head — both quantitative and qualitative — is still quite favourable. Second, the fertility rate is falling quite rapidly, and may decline faster still with

> sensible policies, especially related to child health and women's empowerment. Third, the fertility rate varies widely between different regions in India, and there is much to learn from those that have already achieved low fertility rates, and also much evidence that these achievements are indeed spreading to other regions as well.

JRD Tata had acknowledged that we could learn from our experience and try to further improve upon our performance in this regard. Speaking at the National Seminar on Population Management in New Delhi in August 1987, he had said:

> While there is much to bemoan, there is no cause for despair. We have learnt from our failures and shortcoming as well as from our few successes. We have today the knowledge, the skills and the tools to tackle the obstacles in the way. ...While there is, therefore, no reason for pessimism, clearly much more must be done, and done more effectively than in the past if our advance towards our goal is to be accelerated. A task of this magnitude and complexity necessarily concerns a vast number of different elements and measures to be coordinated into a coherent whole.

If we recognize the importance of participatory process as the key element of good governance, our policies and programmes for population stabilization will find wider acceptance among the people and would lead to better results. We would also do well to recall Pandit Nehru's emphasis on 'economic and educational progress as the only foundation on which we can have any effective progress in regard to family planning'. Our population stabilization goals are reachable in the foreseeable future if we can also achieve much progress in the key areas of education, specially girls' education, public health, water and sanitation, nutrition, employment and poverty alleviation based on equity and gender-sensitivity, all of which have a bearing on our population.

JRD Tata's vision and passion, let us hope, will permeate our decision-making processes towards Population Stabilization and Good Governance.

Thank you.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING: NEED OF THE HOUR*

On behalf of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation and on my own behalf, I would like to sincerely thank the Parliament of Philippines as also the Inter-Parliamentary Union for making such excellent arrangements for the 112th Assembly of the IPU. We are grateful for the kind hospitality accorded by our friends in this beautiful country.

Fellow Parliamentarians, no debate on the global political, economic and social situation will be meaningful unless it addresses the issues relating to women, who constitute half the world population. It is a matter of concern that even thirty years after we celebrated the International Women's Year, and through the four World Conferences on Women, a major section of women are politically, economically and socially still underprivileged in comparison to their male counterparts. As elected representatives of the people and opinion leaders, we, parliamentarians, have to seriously introspect how we can facilitate more innovative policies and programmes for women's welfare and development, and their efficacious implementation.

Politically, women are under-represented in the representative bodies, in the decision-making apparatus, in the governance structures and even in the higher echelons of the political parties themselves. The empowerment of women, in its fullest manifestation, can come about only when they are equal partners in the decision-making structures. Economically, women continue to suffer from deprivations of varied sorts and dimensions. In spite of scientific and technological advancements and economic growth, the fruits and benefits of development have not reached a large section of women effectively. Economic empowerment is, thus, as much a priority as political empowerment.

Poverty, inadequate health care, lack of education, unemployment, problems related to child bearing and child rearing, a patriarchal societal mind-set, among others, impinge upon the women most. Social exploitation, prostitution, trafficking in women and girls, unequal pay for equal work, and other deprivations pose a serious challenge to women everywhere. Especially, in the context of the scare of an HIV/AIDS epidemic, they need the fullest attention with suitable health care system, which is totally inadequate in many countries. Rural women and migrant women are particularly affected badly in all these respects.

* At the 112th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on *The Impact of Domestic and International Policies on the Situation of Women*, Manila, Philippines (3 April 2005).

To ensure the due entitlements to our women, in our country, the thread of gender-mainstreaming runs through all our policies, plans and programmes. Over the years, the emphasis of our strategy on women has shifted from the initial concept of women's welfare to the present day concept of empowerment of women in all its manifestations. We have formulated a comprehensive National Policy for Empowerment of Women, *inter-alia*, to ensure gender-justice. The policy, among other things, aims to achieve advancement of women and their active participation in decision-making process based on equality in power sharing. It also seeks to involve a gender perspective in the development process backed by a strong institutional mechanism to be watched over by a judicial system which is sensitive to women's needs.

Taking guidance from the constitutional directives, the concept of gender equity has been made an integral component of all our plans and policies. Our Tenth Five Year Plan spells out an effective strategy for empowering women, so that they realize their full potential by creating an enabling environment and with a view to making all women economically independent and self-reliant by ensuring for them provision of training, employment and income generation activities, thereby eliminating all forms of gender discrimination. We lay stress on imparting legal literacy, especially to women. The universalisation of the Integrated Child Development Services is another thrust area for the development of our women and children.

Improvement in the health status of women and the girl child is one of our priorities. India has achieved significant progress in advancing the reproductive rights of women through reduced crude birth rate, infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate. Imparting education to the girl child is a national commitment. Through the 86th Constitution Amendment, we have made education a Fundamental Right. Several measures to protect the women and girl children from harassment, domestic violence, sex selective abortion seeking to make the family law more gender-just are in operation. A National Resource Centre for Women has also been set up under the nodal Ministry.

To achieve economic security for women, all the developmental sectors emphasise on women's rights. Gender budgeting has been taken up vigorously. All the Departments of the Government have been urged to develop a gender perspective in planning along with performance-audit of those plans and expenditure. The Women's Component Plan ensures that a minimum of 30 per cent of funds and benefits flow to women from all women-related sectors.

In our country, the emergence and consolidation of a strong women's Self-Help Group movement has greatly strengthened women's empowerment.

Several million women Self-Help Groups are working to promote the saving habit, accessing micro-credit and engaging in productive, income generating activities, and are implementing developmental initiatives like food security, drinking water and sanitation, watershed development, social forestry, etc.

We are also seized of the adverse linkages between trade and gender and are working on the integration of a gender perspective into the macro-economic policies, so as to help women pursue their livelihood options in an increasingly globalised environment. The Social Security Scheme for the unorganized sector workers, announced in the recent past, providing the triple benefit of pension, personal accident insurance and medical insurance, is of special importance to unskilled women workers.

To achieve political empowerment, reservation of one-third of the seats for women in our local bodies has been brought about by the 73rd and 74th amendments to our Constitution. Over a million women have become active partners in the political processes of the country at the grass root levels through free and fair elections. We are now seeking to provide similar representations in Parliament and State Assemblies too. We have in place the National Commission for Women, a statutory body, which protects, promotes and safeguards the interests and rights of women. Several States have also set up similar Commissions for Women. The National Human Rights Commission is also actively engaged in safeguarding the legal and constitutional rights of women. We also have in our Parliament, a Committee on the Empowerment of Women, which is an active body.

India has subscribed to major women-related international instruments like the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, etc. We have also endorsed the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the UN General Assembly Session on Gender Equality and Development and Peace for the 21st Century (2000). India is also a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Though we have made significant progress in improving the conditions of our women; we are fully aware of the areas of concern and that there is still a lot to be achieved. Accordingly, we are emphasizing on an overall gender-sensitive policy, advocacy and monitoring.

As the opinion makers and policy planners, parliamentarians can influence policies and programmes to make them more gender sensitive and can also play a pivotal role in ensuring that gender budgeting is given a special place in the nation's monetary and financial policies. We need to assert that empowerment of women — social, political and economic — permeates all policy initiatives and development programmes so that they can realize their full potential and contribute equally in national development. Gender justice

warrants extra emphasis on the close inter-linkage among political, economic and social prescriptions. Domestic and international policies should, in particular, also address country-specific issues, without compromising on the eventual goal which is a gender-sensitive and gender-just society.

The Parliamentarians can play a very crucial role in addressing the concerns of gender deficit and in creating conditions conducive to gender-equality. The political parties should encourage greater partnership between men and women in the party machinery and electoral process, and in leadership training and empowerment. Affirmative action for increasing the number of women representatives in our legislative bodies should be considered as a priority political agenda.

I heartily compliment the Inter-Parliamentary Union for their ceaseless efforts in facilitating ennobling partnership between women and men as a means to achieve that essential eventual goal.

Thank you.

LEGISLATURE AND AUDIT INTERFACE FOR STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY*

I am happy to be here to inaugurate the one-day Seminar on 'Legislature and Audit Interface for Enforcing and Strengthening Accountability Mechanism' that has been organized by the International Centre for Information Systems and Audit in the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. The theme of the Seminar is of immense topical relevance to all democracies, more so for a parliamentary democracy like ours, which functions through an institutionalized system of checks and balances to secure good governance practices.

As you all know, Executive accountability to the Legislature is one of the cornerstones on which the edifice of a parliamentary democracy is erected. It is also one of the crucial components of good governance, along with securing Rule of Law, ensuring transparency and combating lack of probity. In all these respects, it is imperative to have a proper interface between the Legislature and the supreme audit institution. Parliamentary control over public expenditure is not limited only to voting of moneys required for carrying on the administration of the country but it also extends to ensuring that the expenditure is incurred in a prudent manner and that the objectives underlying the policies approved by the Parliament are achieved. The Legislature has the power to grant appropriations to the Executive for public expenditure, but, mere power to grant funds will not achieve the intended purpose unless the Legislature has the means of ensuring that the moneys voted by it are spent by the Executive for the specified purpose. This is well facilitated by way of providing for audit of Government transactions by an independent authority and the subsequent discussion of the audit report in the Parliament.

In our parliamentary system, the accountability of the Executive to the Parliament is absolute. While the Executive keeps control over the public finance, the Parliament secures the accountability of the Executive through various mechanisms, including the audit report of the Comptroller and

* At the inauguration of the Seminar on *Legislature and Audit Interface for Enforcing and Strengthening Accountability Mechanism* organised by the International Centre for Information Systems and Audit in the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, Noida, Uttar Pradesh (22 July 2005).

Auditor General of India (CAG). The supreme audit authority provided in our Constitution. In our scheme of things, the CAG examines the annual accounts of the Government to satisfy that the moneys granted by the Parliament and the State Legislatures to the respective Executives have been applied to the purpose for which they were intended and that they have been spent according to the laws, rules and regulations governing the subject. The CAG, while submitting the report, brings to the fore, cases of waste and inefficiency, if any. The CAG's observations are of crucial import in matters of accounting and financial principles and go a long way in ensuring and enforcing Executive accountability. The CAG, while acting as a watchdog of public funds, is at once a friend, philosopher and guide to the Parliament and in particular, to the Financial Committees of Parliament.

In our system, parliamentary control over public finance is made to bear in two stages. In the first stage, parliamentary control is exercised at the time of policy making, which finds space in the Annual Budget. In the second stage, parliamentary control is exercised *ex post facto*, in ensuring that the approved policy is implemented without any deviation. The control in the second stage represents the actual interface between the Legislature and the audit which is primarily exercised through the Public Accounts Committee and the Committee on Public Undertakings, both of which stand to benefit from the reports of the CAG.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), is concerned with ascertaining that the moneys granted by the Parliament have been spent by the Government within the scope of the Demand. This implies that the money shown as spent against the grant must not be more than the amount granted and the amount should have been spent specifically for the purposes set out in the detailed Demand. The functions of the Committee extend, however, much beyond the formality of expenditure to its wisdom, faithfulness and economy.

It is in the furtherance of this objective that the PAC examines cases involving losses, nugatory expenditure and financial irregularities and, wherever necessary, calls for an explanation from the concerned Ministry/ Department. When any case of proven negligence resulting in loss to the public exchequer is brought to the notice of the Committee, the Ministry concerned is called upon to explain as to what remedial action, disciplinary or otherwise, has been taken to prevent its recurrence. In such cases, the PAC also records its opinion either disapproving the action of the Government or passing strictures against the extravagance or lack of proper control by the Ministry or Department concerned. The Committee also discusses points of financial discipline and principle.

The Public Accounts Committee, thus, is more concerned with the failure in the system or the control mechanisms which facilitated the loss, defalcation or wastage rather than the individual involved. Though the Committee is not

concerned with the policy of the Government as such, it does, however, point out cases where there have been extravagances, wastage or losses in the implementation of a policy. In a way, the effectiveness of audit depends on the information and inputs it receives from the Committees; likewise, the effectiveness of the Committees, in turn, depends on the independence with which the audit has been conducted and its report compiled.

The Legislature-Audit interface is also witnessed in the functioning of the Committee on Public Undertakings (COPU). The Committee evaluates the performance of a Public Undertaking covering all aspects like implementation of policies, programmes, management, financial working, etc. The Committee also selects for examination matters raised in the audit reports of the CAG on the Public Undertakings which have been taken up for study. This Legislature-Audit interface assumes more importance specially when heavy investment has been made in the PSUs. When the audit by the CAG comes out as the efficiency-cum-performance audit, it enables the Parliament and the Legislative Bodies to effectively review the performance and efficiency of our PSUs.

For all these reasons, the independence of audit is considered absolutely essential in ensuring good governance. The Supreme Audit Institution will not be in a position to discharge, without fear and favour, its duty of scrutinizing the financial action of various authorities, if it is dependent on one or more of such authorities whose actions or orders it might have to challenge. I would say that the audit, independent of Executive, forms an important ingredient of parliamentary democracy and that is why our Constitution provides for such independence. The power of Parliament for voting money for expenditure will be meaningless unless there is a powerful audit to bring to its notice the failure on the part of the Executive in spending the money voted by it for the specified purpose.

Thus, in a vibrant democracy like ours, a relationship of trust and confidence between the Legislatures and CAG is essential to maintain the integrity of the framework of financial accountability in our country.

The basic framework for financial accountability in our country is sound. In fact, it has been a successful model for many emerging democracies. However, modern society is in a state of rapid change. The forces of globalization and technology are incessantly under pinning and driving this change. To meet the rising expectations of the people, the Governments have to cater to various demands of the modern civil society through increased public expenditure. There is now a very sizeable growth of budgetary expenditure on every increasing number of development programmes with proportional increase in receipts. However, mere increase in expenditure is not enough, unless it is matched with correspondingly strengthening of the

accountability and assurance framework, without which the objectives will not be fulfilled.

In this connection, we should take note of some of the major issues or problems which should be attended to for an early solution. Proper functioning of the processes of parliamentary control over public exchequer is directly linked to the capability of the CAG to provide high quality and timely Reports to the Parliament and State Legislatures and the capacity of the Public Accounts Committee and the Committee on Public Undertakings to examine them and issue their recommendations effectively and speedily. The effectiveness of the Legislative Committees is not dependent only on the speed and extent of their examination of CAG's report but also on the Executive's response and commitment to act upon the recommendations made in the Reports of Legislative Committees with speed and without hindrance.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity, when the Chairpersons of Parliamentary and the State Legislative Committees and the CAG have gathered together, to focus on certain crucial issues that concern the CAG and the Legislative Committees. Besides, there are problems in the accountability and compliance systems within the Executive, which have impact on CAG's and Committee's effectiveness. However, appropriate to today's theme, I will confine to the issues in relation to the functions of the Legislative Committees and CAG that should receive urgent attention.

The responsibilities of both the Central and State Governments in India have increased exponentially since Independence. Being a developing country, the Government is required to play a dominant role in economic and social sectors. This demand on the Government to take the country along the path of high industrial and economic growth coupled with its obligation to secure social justice and inclusiveness of the vulnerable sections has resulted in the growth of disbursements of the Union Government by over 400 times between 1950 and now. Similarly, revenues of the Union Government have multiplied 410 times over this period. The position obtaining in the States is similar.

This increase in public expenditure and receipt has directly impacted on the responsibility of audit and more importantly, the workload of the CAG. In 1950-51, the CAG's Audit Report for the Union comprised, a single volume only. It was possible for the Committee consisting of 22 members, 15 from the Lok Sabha and 7 from the Rajya Sabha, to examine the reports, issue recommendations and follow them up for substantive action by the Executive on their recommendations. Today, CAG tables over 21 Reports in the Parliament and 62 Reports in the State Legislatures. Out of the 21 Reports tabled by CAG in the Parliament, PAC examines 14 relating to receipt and expenditure of the Union Government. The other 7 Reports on the accounts and performance of the Public Sector Undertakings are examined by the

COPU. These Reports together contain hundreds of paragraphs and performance reviews. I understand from CAG that this number is almost certain to increase with emphasis on performance audits and coverage of more and more subjects.

Both the PAC and the COPU are today faced with a heavy overload of work. Despite the best intent and efforts by the chairpersons, the Committees find it almost impossible to examine in time all issues, give recommendations and pursue follow up to a logical conclusion. Even the well-intentioned decision of the Committees of the Parliament to examine the paragraphs on selective basis and ask the Executive to submit Action Taken Notes to them on the remaining paragraphs has its own limitations. Firstly, the selection of the paragraphs, keeping in view the limited time that the Committees can devote, leaves out a large number of very important matters in the Reports from the purview of the examination by the Committees. Secondly, though it is a tribute to the spirit of probity and oversight of the Committees that they always select a large number of subjects with the hope of examining them, the actual examination has been limited to a small number of paragraphs. For example, the number of paragraphs examined every year by the PAC has remained around 10-15 against the total number of over 700-1000 paragraphs included in CAG's Reports submitted to the PAC. The paragraphs not selected are seldom attended to once PAC has finalized its Report since there is no system of examination by the Committee of the *suo moto* Action Taken Notes by the Executive. Thus, the Action Taken is largely formal rather than substantive.

It is a matter of deep concern that in the State Legislatures against a pendency of 12,168 audit paras to be examined by the Committees in 2004, the total number of paras discussed was only 511. I understand that in some States, Audit Reports of the CAG are pending discussion by the concerned PACs from 1983-84. In a large number of cases, Reports on the matters examined are delayed. Public audit by its very nature is essentially a *posteriori* exercise and by the time the entire processes of auditing and reporting are completed, some time has already elapsed. Delaying the examination of the matters brought out in the Reports runs the risk of rendering a large number of them irrelevant.

It is not as if Legislatures have not been concerned or diligent about tackling this problem of work overload. Shakdhar Committee's recommendations have been accepted by many PACs in the States. The PAC of Parliament has also devised an improved system for speedy disposal. However, these efforts are found to be inadequate in view of rapid increase in the workload. The sheer volume and complexity of the exercise is straining the physical capacity, in spite of their best and sincere efforts, of the

Committees to discharge effectively the role of legislative scrutiny over Government's finances and performance. In this context, we should comprehensively review the situation and look at radical means to address and overcome the problem. I am happy to note that this Seminar will deliberate on this crucial issue.

To find out solutions, many PACs including the PAC of the Parliament have set up Working Groups and Sub-Committees to deal with audit paras that cannot be considered in detail by the full Committee. Ways must be found to strengthen the work of these Sub-Committees or Working Groups.

Suggestions have been made in the past that the Sub-Committees should be empowered to deal with subjects referred to them by the main Committee in a conclusive manner after approval of the Chairman of PAC and allowed to record evidence of the Executive. Their recommendations could be approved by the Chairman and endorsed by other members by circulation.

Another suggestion that you may like to deliberate is whether Sub-Committees, particularly those of the Public Accounts Committee, could be constituted department-wise for major departments *e.g.* Defence, Railways, etc. at the Centre or like the Public Works Department in the States, for study and scrutiny of public accounting purposes. This is a practice in some countries, which have a PAC system like we have in India. It may also be debated whether formation of Working Groups or Sub-Committees on these lines to examine the paragraphs finally, is possible within the existing strength of the PAC and COPU.

The CAG has the responsibility to audit receipts of the Government as well as its expenditure. As far as the Union Government is concerned, CAG currently tables four Reports in Parliament on Direct and Indirect Taxes alone. I believe, CAG is contemplating an additional Audit Report on Non Tax Revenues, looking to their growing importance. We all realize that the Receipt Audit Reports of the CAG have a direct revenue implication for the Government. It is, therefore, essential that Receipt Audit Reports receive the speediest consideration in the PACs. But this has not been possible because of the constraint of time. You may like to discuss in this Seminar if the time is ripe for a separate Committee for receiving the Receipt Audit Reports of the CAG to enable quick and timely disposal of these Reports.

The second major issue that our accountability framework faces today is that some new financial arrangements and institutions by-pass CAG's statutory audit. The first of such arrangements is the devolution of grants directly to the third tier of Government namely the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies.

Devolution and delegation for grass root level planning and execution, unless matched by equally pervasive and independent accountability and oversight system is a glaring loophole in our scheme of financial accountability. Authority and responsibility must go together. As you are aware, primary audit of these institutions under our Constitution is the responsibility of the State Government whose capacity both financially and technically is strained. I understand that CAG's institution is the primary auditor only in the three States — Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, and in other States, CAG audits only those local bodies which fall under his audit purview.

The Eleventh Finance Commission, noting the risk of this arrangement, had recommended that the State Governments should entrust the CAG with the responsibility of exercising control and supervision over the proper maintenance of accounts and their audit of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. The Government of India, Ministry of Finance has advised State Governments to consider entrusting PRI audit to the CAG. I am happy to note that 18 major States have already fully entrusted audit of PRIs/ULBs to the CAG under the Technical Guidance and Supervision Scheme (TGSS) formulated by him. It would promote the cause of grass root level accountability and professional oversight, if remaining, the State Governments consider similar action.

Moreover mere entrustment of guidance and supervision over the works of local fund examiners by itself is not enough if the Reports prepared by CAG's organization are dealt with finally at the executive level. In some States, like Kerala and Rajasthan, Legislative Committees have already been established to deal with the Reports of the CAG relating to PRIs/ULBs audit. I would recommend similar action in other States also as recommended by the Eleventh Finance Commission.

The matter of accountability of NGOs, increasingly being involved with the execution of public sector programmes is another area of serious concern. The NGOs are not subject to audit by CAG. The reliability of their accounts from the point of view of their actual utilization for the intended purpose is uncertain in some cases. Many countries have provided for audit by public auditors of every unit of Government or tax payer's money, irrespective of the agency through which these are spent and we must consider on similar lines.

There are attempts to keep the regulatory bodies, whose decisions affect the Government finances and the public in a significant manner, out of CAG jurisdiction through statutory provisions like TRAI Act. We should be aware of the emerging risks of such efforts and must take suitable measures in the best interest of the country and the general public.

The third major problem faced by the current accountability system is the increasing inclination to dilute or even exclude CAG's auditory jurisdiction over the audit of public sector undertakings. There is even a suggestion that Government companies should be taken out of the purview of the CAG's audit. I view this with great concern as it dilutes the accountability of enterprises created out of public money.

In my view, a public sector corporation is not merely a profit maximizing commercial entity. It is difficult for a private auditor carrying out a financial audit to report comprehensively on the performance of a public sector corporation in respect of achievements of its social and other special objectives for which the government may have set it up. CAG's audit not only verifies on compliance, transparency, regularity and propriety but also economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the management of the PSU. Past history has shown that CAG's audit of public sector enterprises has been able to identify major instances of mis-management, waste and fraud, including material errors in accounts, which would have gone undetected, had the Company Law not empowered the CAG to carry out supplementary and test audit.

Thus, though our accountability framework is sound, it faces many risks, as mentioned. I hope this Seminar will contribute in a substantial manner in providing solutions that can mitigate the risks that our financial accountability framework faces today.

As you are well aware, there is an increasing emphasis the world over on securing good governance in all its manifestations. Governmental expenditure and allocations for developmental programmes have increased manifold in the recent decades. Today, we are debating aspects of economic reforms and issues relating to the WTO regime. We are also discussing matters pertaining to the better performance and further streamlining of our Public Sector Undertakings and governmental institutions which we have built up with substantial investments in terms of money and manpower.

The Parliament and its Committees have been deliberating on all these topical subjects with serious concern, especially the financial issues involved. The huge financial allocations associated with our policies and programmes and our PSUs also make it a matter of utmost importance to the health and well being of our economy, rather the nation as a whole, that efficiency, economy and prudence become the hallmarks of their functioning.

If the Parliament, as the Supreme Legislative Institution of the country, has to exercise effectively its cardinal role of ensuring Executive accountability in all its varied manifestations, it is imperative that it receives unstinted cooperation from the Supreme Audit Institution. Both of us are partners in the gigantic and challenging task of nation-building. Our interface has been

and must continue to be marked by harmony and complementarity in the larger cause of national weal. As one who has been associated with the Parliament for over three decades, I can say with confidence that the CAG has all through been a vital force and a pillar of strength to the Parliament in exercising its constitutionally ordained duty of ensuring Executive accountability. Therefore, we have a collective responsibility in ensuring that the office of the CAG retains the independence and autonomy enjoined by the Constitution and the CAG's (DPC) Act and that its authority and ambit are not curtailed.

I greatly appreciate the initiative taken by the CAG in organizing this Seminar and look forward to concrete recommendations emerging from the deliberations that would help in strengthening not only accountability and the quality of financial administration in our country but also in promoting good governance.

With these words, I inaugurate the Seminar and I wish it all success.

Thank you.

OCEAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

I am very happy to have the opportunity to associate myself with the Foundation Day celebrations of the Department of Ocean Development. All the more so since this is your Silver Jubilee year. I extend my greetings to the Hon'ble Minister and all the officers and employees of the Department for attaining this important milestone and wish all your future activities and initiatives, a great success.

This Department, very appropriately established twenty-five years back, with the mandate to formulate and implement programmes in ocean science and technology with long-term scientific, technological, economic and geo-political benefits, has been discharging a crucial role for the country. Surrounded as we are by ocean on our three sides, with our 7,500 kilometres long coastline and the seas around us impacting upon the lives of about 370 million people, among whom about 7 million are engaged in fishing, and with our two large island systems, the Andaman & Nicobar and the Lakshadweep, with their special geographical connection with the seas around them, one can understand the enormity of the tasks that this Department has to handle.

Indian Ocean, the third largest ocean in the world, has a unique geographic setting. The frequent occurrence of cyclones in the Bay of Bengal, the unique bio-geo-chemical processes in the Arabian Sea and the bi-annual reversal of monsoon winds and currents make the Indian Ocean a complex oceanic realm. It has been a subject of serious concern for the countries around this region and for the international community.

In 1982, the Ocean Policy Statement was announced containing the broad framework of action to enable India to be in the forefront of the international efforts in the oceanic realm. We are happy that the country has made considerable progress in developing the ocean science and technology. Our successes in the Antarctic expeditions, our strides in developing technologies for ocean observation and instrumentation, the lead we have made in developing the technology for harnessing energy from the ocean, among

* At the Foundation Day Function of the Department of Ocean Development, New Delhi (27 July 2005).

others, are, indeed, commendable achievements. What is important today, however, as of all other governmental efforts, is to take the full benefits of these advances to the common man.

Your ambitious desalination plant in Kavaratti is a good beginning in that direction. I am sure, the Department will commission such big plants, wherever necessary, after considering all aspects for their due implementation, in a phased manner. The fact that even after nearly six decades of freedom, we are not able to offer safe drinking water to a substantial section of our population emphasizes the necessity of taking effective and speedy action in the matter. We have to make concerted attempts to address this issue, which is one of the basic concerns of our people, and, I would say, a fundamental duty which all should try to discharge efficiently and expeditiously. With this objective, we in Parliament have constituted the Parliamentary Forum on Water. We need to have a strictly time-bound action plan to provide safe drinking water to all our people in the nearest future.

I am happy to learn that substantial progress has been made by the Department for establishing Early Warning Systems for the mitigation of oceanographic disasters, like Tsunami and Storm Surges in the Indian Ocean. We should make ceaseless efforts to put the available technologies at the service of the people so that the common man can have the benefit of progress in science. Considering our size, population and geographic location, India should be able to play a leading role in the affairs of the ocean management, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region. Our scientists, technologists and administrators should work together to achieve the desired goals.

The Department's perspective plan for 2015, which has identified as its mission, among other things, the improvement of our understanding of the ocean, especially the Indian Ocean; the sustainable development of ocean resources; improvement in the livelihood of those dependent on our ocean resources; timely warnings of coastal hazards and the creation of an Ocean Commission as a national framework for effectively coordinating the ocean-related issues, is a well-conceived document.

We should continue to focus on research and development in this sector and develop cutting edge marine technologies which can provide a sustainable momentum for development. We should be able to retain our prime position in Antarctica and, in the near future, India should emerge as a significant global player, on its own right, in maritime technology and instrumentation. The lead role played by India in interactions with the international community during the World Conference on Disaster Reduction at Kobe, Japan, and the Ministerial Meeting at Phuket, Thailand, highlighted the opportunity for India to play a lead role in the crucial Indian Ocean Region.

Ocean science and technology has an important role to play in realizing the 'Vision of India' becoming a developed nation by 2020. We should be able to exploit the enormous potential offered by our ocean resources for the benefit of our people. By using the technological strides already made in this field, we should be able to make more reliable and timely forecast of weather conditions and provide early warnings to the people living in the coastal areas about the disasters caused by disturbances in the oceans, so that the destructive impact of such disasters on the people could be reduced. Ultimately, our objective should be to effectively transform our vast ocean resources as a means for the sustainable development of our people, particularly of the coastal population, without disturbing the coastal ecosystem. The Department of Ocean Development has to have regular and very close interaction at both research and operational level with the scientific community in the field of atmospheric and space research and ensure that there is a seamless flow of data, information and knowledge which need to percolate down to the end users, and thereby getting integrated with the development process in the country.

Friends, ocean will be a key determinant for the future of humanity. India should be second to none in the use of ocean science and technology for national development. Multi-disciplinary efforts in cooperation with the concerned national and international agencies, and appropriate institutional mechanisms are required to accomplish this. The Department under the dynamic leadership of our very active and articulate Minister of State, Shri Kapil Sibal, should be able to pool in the available scientific talents in the country for this and become one of the best in the world in the near future. Human resources development and the quality of the infrastructure will be the key determining factors for the future. We need to have an effective strategy for developing the national capacity for ocean science and technology. I am sure, your Perspective Plan 2015, will provide the necessary guidance in this endeavour.

I am happy to note that a onetime special cover is also being released today to mark your Silver Jubilee Year. With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate your Foundation Day celebrations. I extend my good wishes for the success of the various programmes planned by the Department for the benefit of the people.

Thank you.

GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY: PEOPLE-CENTRED GOVERNANCE*

I consider it a privilege and an honour to be present here at the inauguration of the Workshop on Panchayati Raj organized by the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) for the members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly. I am indeed grateful to the Hon'ble Speaker, Shri Therambil Ramakrishnan for inviting me to associate with this Workshop. I greatly appreciate the initiative taken by the Government of Kerala and 'KILA' to impart training on the functional dynamics of the panchayati raj system to the elected representatives of the people through this Workshop. The State of Kerala has been a pioneer in good governance practices in the country. Kerala is also known the world over for its remarkable achievements in development planning. The State's ceaseless endeavours towards the holistic welfare of its people also find reflection in its farsighted decision of establishing an institution like 'KILA' to impart training in local administration and panchayati raj institutions.

I am happy to note that since its inception, 'KILA', as the nodal agency for training, research and consultancy in respect of local self-government, has been focusing on areas relating to capacity building activities for panchayati raj institutions. Your thrust areas like decentralized planning, local governance, good urban governance, gender and development, poverty alleviation, development of marginalized groups, sustainable development, etc. are key components with which elected representatives at all levels should be fully familiarized. I extend my best wishes to you in all your endeavours.

Increasingly, the world over, greater focus is now being laid on practising and promoting 'people-centred governance as an expression of grassroots democratization process.' Democracy acquires credibility only when the average citizen and the underprivileged have the capability to ask questions, hold the Government of the day accountable and are fully enabled to participate in the process of governance. Peoples' participation in governance is an important yardstick for measuring the quality of the democratic process. As such, what is important is that we should have inclusive governance by promoting participatory democracy in all its manifestations.

* At the inauguration of the Workshop on Panchayati Raj for the members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, organised by the Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur, Kerala (7 August 2005).

To achieve the same, it is necessary to bring the institutions of governance nearer to the people. The democratization of governance structures should go a long way in this regard. Governance, to be successful, has to be a participatory process, including at all levels of representative bodies. Greater coordination and regular consultation among the elected representatives belonging to different levels would help in avoiding bureaucratic delay and duplication of work, as also for building consensual policies and programmes for the welfare of the people. The panchayati raj system, which we have envisioned, is a noble endeavour keeping all these factors in mind.

India lives in its villages, as Gandhiji said. The panchayats cover about 96 per cent of India's more than 5.8 lakh villages and nearly 95.6 per cent rural population. In our country, today, the panchayati raj institutions constitute the bedrock for the implementation of the various rural development programmes. Mahatma Gandhi once said: 'The best, quickest and the most efficient way is to build up from bottom. Every village has to become a self-sufficient republic. This does not require brave resolutions. It requires brave, intelligent work ... ' At the time of Independence, Gandhiji had stressed: 'When Panchayati Raj is established, public opinion will do what violence can never do. The present power of zamindars, the capitalists and the rajas can hold sway so long as the common people do not realize their own strength. If the people non-cooperate with the evil zamindari or capitalism, it must die of inanition. In Panchayati Raj only the Panchayat will be obeyed and the Panchayat can only work through the law of their making.'

Gandhiji's views on strengthening our Panchayati Raj system are reflected in the Constitution in the Directive Principles of State Policy which mandate 'the State to take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government'. West Bengal enacted the laws relating to Panchayats in 1953, which were very successfully implemented there by the Left Front Government since 1978, and soon it became a role model.

But, it took us more than four decades to provide constitutional sanctity to the panchayati raj institutions through the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendments; nevertheless, they are indeed a remarkable contribution of the Indian polity to the cause of grassroots, democracy and decentralization of power and authority. As a result of these progressive legislations, today, we have about 28 lakh elected representatives out of whom one-third or about nine lakh are women. Thus, a silent revolution through empowerment is happening in the Indian villages and the result of this empowerment and devolution of power is being felt in the Indian polity in many ways.

We now have at the Centre a full-fledged Ministry of Panchayati Raj headed by one of its passionate advocates, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyer. I am sure, its positive impact will soon begin to be felt across the country. It is indeed a challenge to the Central and the State Governments to see that the objectives enshrined in the statutes are realized and the developmental aspirations of the people are addressed in the most democratic and transparent way. For this, it is important that there is total commitment, objectivity, a sense of devotion and, above all, a political will from the State and the Central Governments and also from the civil service. This is indeed a gigantic task enjoined by the Constitution on all of us.

Friends, the perspective and methodology of planning for development has undergone tremendous change since the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts. Now, the emphasis is on planning from below with participation at the grassroots level. Today, it is the responsibility of the Gram Sabhas, the village panchayats, the block panchayats and the district panchayats to decide about the developmental works to be carried out in their jurisdictions. They are expected to have a definite say as it is a peoples' programme with the people as the ultimate beneficiaries as well as the initiators of any project. Hence, it is important that as elected representatives and leaders of society, the members of the Legislative Assemblies as well as the members of Parliament are fully familiar with the various laws and functions of these institutions and the objectives to be achieved through them and also practical knowledge about the functions of the panchayati raj institutions.

I understand that the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 was thoroughly restructured in 1999 and several innovative features have been incorporated to give legal foundation for building up genuine institutions of local self-government in order to suit the native realities of the Kerala society. In this respect, I notice that there is a clear demarcation of responsibilities for each of the three tiers of local self-governance with the Gram Sabhas given clear rights and responsibilities with absolute powers for identification of beneficiaries, strong advisory powers for prioritizing developmental needs, and wide powers for social audit. This truly reflects real democratic decentralization and devolution of powers to the grassroot level. It is also interesting to note that aspects of Committee System with which we are familiar in the Parliament and in the State Legislative Assemblies have been incorporated in the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act also. In fact, I must acknowledge that Kerala is a pioneer in the introduction of Subject Committees in our Legislative Bodies which it introduced way back in 1980; such Committees have been introduced in the Parliament and in many other States much later. The introduction of such Standing Committees at the village, block and the district panchayats is indeed laudable as it ensures a close scrutiny of the

allocations for and also of developmental works, ensuring greater transparency and facilitating accountability in the system.

It is indeed noteworthy that while implementing the Panchayati Raj Act, Kerala has provided leadership in various aspects. Welfare and poverty alleviation are now largely dependent on local governments which also have considerable responsibility in the primary sector. By transferring critical institutions of public services like hospitals, schools, *anganwadis*, veterinary institutes, Krishi Bhawans, hostels for scheduled castes and care institutes for different disadvantaged groups, the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act has made substantial devolution of powers and brought these institutions closer to the people by making them part of the administrative and delivery systems. This will definitely help in inculcating a sense of responsibility and belonging among the people to these institutions as all these are managed by the locally elected representatives.

Since substantial responsibilities have been entrusted to the local governments, I would stress that the accountability system requires special importance. In harmony with local government functioning and participatory budgeting and in addition to the traditional system of checks and balances, a new form of downward accountability to the people has to be structured in the panchayati raj institutions. That is why I would highly commend the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act for incorporating accountability features like the Committee System of decision-making, due process in the selection of beneficiaries' schemes, social audit, right to information, Citizen's Charter, etc. Recently, at a Seminar organized by the C&AG, I was told that Kerala and Rajasthan are the only two States to have introduced Legislative Committees to deal with the Reports of the C&AG's audit report on the panchayati raj institutions. I understand that even the elected members have to file their property statements immediately on their elections. This is how, to my mind, the concepts of accountability and transparency are given meaning and content in a democracy.

It is also a timely move that the Government has decided to computerize all its local governments and network them. I am told that the 'Information Kerala Mission' has been set up for this purpose. For a State with hundred per cent literacy, as also a high level of computer literacy, it will be easy to reap the benefits of IT and literacy together for the efficient and effective management of the local bodies.

The success of the panchayati raj system depends on the extent to which the capabilities and capacities of the elected representatives are developed to discharge their functions and responsibilities effectively. I am sure that the 1,214 local bodies in Kerala comprising 951 Gram Panchayats, 152 Block Panchayats, 14 District Panchayats, 53 Municipalities and 5 Corporations in

Urban Areas would lead the panchayati raj movement in India in such a way that other States would want to follow the 'Kerala Model', which you all have already made very popular and has become an idiom in the developmental phraseology of planners, civil servants and social scientists across the world.

The last decade has raised aspirations of large sections of our people about the institutions of local self-governance. These institutions have helped strengthen our democratic cause substantially by facilitating the empowerment of the people economically, politically and socially. It is, in a way, a silent revolution happening in each and every village with everyone wanting to be partners in the process of development. And, the most striking feature of this system is the inclusion of the marginalized sections in the democratic process. A large number of women, the underprivileged and socially and economically backward people have come to occupy positions of power as a consequence of reservation provided to them in the panchayats. Slowly and steadily, these sections of our society are finding a place in the Indian political establishment and this will undoubtedly contribute to the emergence of a new broad-based political leadership in the country in the long run.

There have been many achievements across the panchayati raj institution in building confidence which has rekindled the hope of the local people as things are happening very near to them and also because they are part and parcel of the developmental process. It has become a people-oriented programme as the local people themselves decide the priority and the necessity of projects. The near and total absence of middlemen in the development works also contributes towards increasing the people's confidence in the system.

Various studies have been done by different agencies about the working of the panchayati raj institutions, including by the Parliamentary Committees. The underlying theme in all these studies is that to keep up the momentum of decentralization, it is necessary that political will, an enabling environment, and above all, necessary financial devolution are essential factors. The success of decentralization depends to a large extent upon the autonomy granted to these constitutionally elected bodies. But it is generally felt that in the field of fiscal decentralization, financial devolution has not happened the way it was expected. It is impressive that Kerala demonstrated considerable political will by devolving approximately 40 per cent of the State Plan allocation to the local bodies, of which 70 per cent went to the Gram Panchayats. I am sure, as in the past, Kerala would be one of the leading States in the effective functioning of their local bodies.

In this respect, it is important and essential that there is objectivity in the financing of panchayats based on the grassroots realities rather than their

political affiliation. Once elections are over, everyone should work together to identify areas that require urgent attention with a view to benefitting the maximum number of people as well as addressing issues that require urgent action. A coordinated and focused approach to problems by the various agencies at the grassroot level can really usher in a developmental revolution and everyone should work to make that revolution happen.

On another plane, there is a feeling that there is duplication of work done by the panchayati raj institutions and the developmental schemes initiated by the members of Parliament and the State Legislative Assemblies. In this respect, it is important that the elected representatives of Parliament and the Legislative Assemblies work together with the members of the local bodies to ensure that there is no duplication of work. The allocations can be better utilized if they work together in a coordinated manner.

In the years to come, the panchayati raj institutions have to play a major role in the development of the country. What is urgently called for is serious intervention in the capacity building of its elected representatives. It is imperative that these institutions are given the political space they deserve and a fair chance to demonstrate their strength and purpose in the most effective way. I am sure that, in the coming years, the Panchayats would lead an era of development at the grassroots level. In all these endeavours, the elected representatives of the State Legislative Assemblies and the Parliament have to be friends, philosophers and guides to their counterparts in the local self-government institutions. They can share their rich and varied experience with their grassroots level representatives, provide them with valuable insights into accountability mechanisms, enable leadership training and strengthen participatory governance. They must always bear in mind that all of them have a shared constituency, namely the people. Elected representatives at various levels should not be competing centres of power but complementary components in the larger cause of national weal.

The panchayats are the building blocks to development and prosperity of our people. The success of our democracy and the progress of the nation itself will depend on how, together, we strengthen our governance structures. The enlightened people's representatives of Kerala, I am sure, fully realize this. I am confident that this Workshop will further strengthen their commitment to democracy and development. With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate this important Seminar.

Thank you.

PARLIAMENTARIANS' INTERFACE WITH WELFARE ISSUES*

I am indeed pleased to join you this morning at the inauguration of this Lecture Series for Members of Parliament being organised by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training of the Lok Sabha Secretariat.

The objective of this Lecture Series is to provide a meeting ground for interaction between members of Parliament and experts in diverse fields. Hon'ble members of Parliament have specific areas of interest to them. Today's world is one of specialisation. Increasingly, subject experts are coming to play a crucial role in policy formulation and implementation. Hon'ble Members of Parliament, it is believed, will stand to benefit from interactions with experts and specialists in different fields. It was thus that we contemplated holding Lectures by specialists and experts in different fields so that our members of Parliament can be acquainted with the developments in different areas which will help them in discharging their functions. The first Lecture in the Series is to be delivered today by Ms. Sunita Narain, Director, Centre for Science and Environment on the topical theme 'Water Conservation'.

Several Parliaments have constituted separate Fora on specific issues of national concern so that members can come together and discuss a particular issue and its wider ramifications outside the strict procedural confines of the Legislature and the Committees. Such a Forum also enables them to gain from the experience of experts in the concerned field as well. Recently a Parliamentary Forum on Water Conservation and Management has been set up under my Chairmanship, which has been welcomed by the leaders of the different Parties. This Forum aims at equipping the Members of Parliament with information and knowledge regarding issues and developments in the area of water conservation and management so that they can take up this crucial issue at the constituency level throughout the country. I trust that this Forum will play a significant role in motivating and energizing all the concerned individuals and organizations in their endeavours towards the conservation and management of our finite water resources. If this exercise succeeds, I am contemplating similar Parliamentary Fora on Youth, Children, Population, etc.

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* At the inauguration of the Lecture Series for Members of Parliament organised by the BPST, New Delhi (17 August 2005).

Friends, it is common knowledge that water is an essential and perhaps the most basic resource for life on earth. But, according to a UN estimate, presently, some 1.1 billion people in the world do not have access to sufficient drinking water, while 2.4 billion people live without decent sanitation. The current prediction is that if necessary water conservation measures are not taken soon, half of the world's population will be affected by chronic shortage of fresh water by the year 2025, when a large portion of human population will be living in urban areas stretching the facilities of water supply, sanitation and waste-water treatment to a breaking point. The state of affairs is so alarming that the United Nations has declared the decade 2005 to 2015 as the 'Water for Life' Decade.

It is undeniable that the lack of fresh water limits a country's ability to maintain public health and to develop industry and agriculture. Given the high population growth rates of many of the water-scarce countries such as ours, they suffer either limits on their use of water, thereby hindering economic progress, or reliance on contaminated and untreated water, causing a number of water-borne diseases. In fact, inadequate water supplies are both a cause and an effect of poverty. Invariably, those without adequate and affordable water supplies are the poorest in the society. Access to fresh water is, therefore, a prerequisite for reducing poverty and in achieving sustainable development.

Because of diverse reasons, there are severe pressures on our scarce water resources. Rapid urbanisation and increasing demand for water from industry and agriculture are threatening the limited ground water resources. Reducing per capita availability of water, over exploitation of groundwater sources, lack of an effective system for the conservation and management of water resources, adverse effects of water-related disasters such as floods and droughts in many parts of the country are some of the serious challenges our country has been facing. In order to maintain our groundwater resource potential, measures for dovetailing rain-water harvesting will have to be necessarily taken on a large scale by the governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as the public at large. We must, therefore, popularise rain-water harvesting in every nook and corner of the country. It is in this context that I offered the Parliament House Complex, the Speaker's residence and official premises under my control for rain-water harvesting purposes.

Our future planning in the water sector must necessarily be a composite package of development and management, and this can be achieved only with the active participation of all stakeholders at all stages of development and management of our water resources. To manage our water resources for diverse uses, we must work with a participatory approach involving not only the governmental agencies but also the common people in the process of planning, designing and execution of all our schemes focused on water.

We cannot arrive at a sustainable solution to the current problem, unless and until we address all our water-related issues in a comprehensive, responsible and forward-looking manner. We already have several inter-State disputes insofar as water resources are concerned which is a matter of grave concern. All these call for a holistic approach to water-conservation and management. I am sure, in today's Lecture, Ms. Sunita Narain will present before you an integrated view of the problem of water conservation and management.

As I said earlier, more issues of topical public importance will be covered under the Lecture Series in the days ahead when you will have an opportunity to interact with experts having specialised knowledge in their respective fields. The Lectures in the Series, I am confident, will not only enlighten all of us about the various contemporary problems substantially impacting on the socio-economic fabric of our country but also help us in playing a proactive role in tackling those problems meaningfully. With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Lecture Series.

Thank you.

HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT*

It is a matter of privilege and an honour for me to be here with you and to associate myself with the Foundation Day Celebrations of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). Let me extend my best wishes to the entire CSIR fraternity on this happy and auspicious occasion.

There is great appreciation in the country of the positive and pro-people work being done by the CSIR over the decades. In a developing country like ours, the scientific community has a very important role to play. Indeed, the multifarious initiatives that the CSIR has taken to see that the fruits of science and technology are available for the benefit of the average Indian have been impressive. CSIR is known to be using advancements in science and technology to meet the basic human needs relating to food, health, water, energy, employment and shelter, amongst others. It has made commendable progress in several fields, starting from agriculture to space research, and made a mark as an organization driven by pursuit of excellence and an urge to contribute to the process of nation-building.

We must realise that our multifarious socio-economic problems can be effectively addressed only through scientific, technological and industrial progress. We all aspire for the transformation of India on modern scientific lines, extending the benefits of education and health-care to all. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru always laid great emphasis on developing a scientific temper among Indians and underscored the importance of science and technology in the task of nation-building and in establishing an egalitarian and rational society.

Our scientists are exploring the heights of space and the depths of the oceans. India is now one of the leading nations in developing and using space technology for the benefit of humanity. Our ocean scientists have been making enormous strides in harnessing gas hydrates, a vast energy resource in the ocean bed. The results of our R&D in the medical and pharmaceuticals fields are also attracting global attention. Indian companies are providing low-cost drugs to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa. CSIR's successes in developing affordable drugs for the poor and for the treatment of tropical diseases such as malaria, are particularly commendable. We are matching global standards of excellence in the frontier area of bio-technology. The spirit of innovation

* At the Foundation Day Celebrations of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), New Delhi (26 September 2005).

and excellence is now spreading to many new areas. Undoubtedly, India's most remarkable success in recent years has been in the field of information technology. The success lies not only in the steadily rising software exports but also in the growing opportunities in outsourcing of services. Every area of India's socio-economic development today bears the signature of Indian science and technology in some form or the other. These achievements, however, should not make us complacent. There are still numerous challenges to be addressed by our scientific community for the country.

Natural calamities like the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in December last year, the typhoon which hit Japan recently and the hurricanes which affected the United States badly, have exposed the vulnerability of mankind in the face of nature's fury. Our scientists and technologists must make constant and vigorous efforts to study these phenomena more intensely so that effective early warning systems can be developed, thereby minimising destruction and human suffering. As we, in India, regularly face the problems of floods, cyclones and droughts, some effective system of management of these disasters needs to be developed to increase our preparedness and for effectively handling the post-disaster problems. Only when development in these areas takes place, which are crucial for the very survival of people in different parts of the country, who become victims of natural disasters, can we say that science is making a difference in the lives of the people.

First and foremost, our scientific community has to strive more for solving the problems afflicting our country, like lack of availability of safe drinking water, food, health, education and housing. For example, acute scarcity of clean water has assumed grave proportions in many parts of the country. I would like to urge our scientific and technologies establishment to develop low-cost technologies for water conservation and recycling. We also need to make efforts to find ways of making desalination of sea water more economically viable. Bad monsoons have been forcing a number of farmers to even take their lives in desperation. Scientists working in the field of agriculture may carry out intensive research in the field of dryland farming and for developing more high yielding variety of seeds so that our farmers do not remain totally dependent on the monsoons and the vagaries of the weather. We need to introduce science and technology inputs in our agriculture, cottage and small-scale industries as well as services in the informal sector. By making these economic activities more productive and profitable, we can unleash their enormous potential for employment generation.

We must make efforts to develop technology to herald an era of progress and prosperity while preserving our environment. Our natural resources are limited and ecological biodiversity hangs on a delicate balance. Thus, while

on the one hand we have to limit our exploitation of our natural resources, on the other, we have to develop eco-friendly and viable technologies. The efforts to make use of our access to solar and wind energy have succeeded only partially. Solar energy is one area where, I feel, more research should be carried out to make it more affordable and consumer friendly. Studies have shown that if we can develop just one per cent of solar potential we would be able to produce 20 times the energy derived from conventional sources. Similarly, India's wind energy potential is estimated to be between 30,000 and 50,000 MW. In tapping these sources and thereby addressing one of our major developmental concerns, organizations like the CSIR can play a vital role.

The challenges before Indian science are manifold. There is an enormous unutilised potential of our people which can be used for transforming India into an economic powerhouse. This will be achieved only when all our people are fully empowered, socially, and economically, utilising the benefit of modern science and technology, including IT in the different areas of the country.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said: 'It is an inherent obligation of a great country like India with its tradition of scholarship and original thinking, and its great cultural heritage, to participate fully in the march of science, which is probably mankind's greatest enterprise today'. We have the human capital and the will to realize this vision. We have to go beyond just participation in the march of science. We must perceive science as a social movement. Indian science must strive for excellence. We also need to make scientific research in our country more and more application-based.

There is also a need to bring together the members of the Parliament, legislators and the general public face-to-face with our scientists. Members of Parliament can be invited by CSIR to periodically visit their national laboratories and understand both the processes and products of science. Such exposure and interaction will help the members of Parliament as well as the various Parliamentary Standing Committees in promoting a very healthy relationship between the Parliament and our scientific community.

There is no developed country in the world where Indian scientists have not made a mark in their core areas of scientific research. They need to replicate that role with even more enthusiasm for our country also. Achievements of science are for the whole humanity, not for a privileged few. As an eminent scientist once observed, 'a scientist belongs to the whole humanity in times of peace and to his country, in times of war.'

We are almost into the seventh decade of freedom. Yet we are still heavily dependent on other countries for our major defence equipments, for quality aircrafts, and for several other important items. It should be our national

priority to have world-class research institutions that can effectively address our country-specific requirements. As a learned analyst observed, 'our institutions are still busy solving the problems of the developed West', as most of our best talents find themselves more relevant for the requirements of those countries. Why is it so ? One of the reasons, to my mind, is that we do not give sufficient attention to the importance of quality research in our institutions of learning and our scientific establishments. We must recognise that scientific progress in the country and social progress as such can be achieved only through intensive research and also much wider research facilities in different areas of science and technology. We cannot ignore the fact that research facilities are still inadequate for a country with such great potential as ours. It is essential to have a national commitment to provide more research centres and fully equipped laboratories with adequate provision for funds.

Friends, whatever investment is made in science and technology, if properly utilised, will ultimately result in the achievement of a self-reliant, knowledge-based society. Science has to be guided by empirical standards, reason and logic. We cannot afford to waste our limited resources for confusing science with mythology and faith with reason. Scientists are the primary agents through whom the traditional societies are transformed into modern ones. It is for the political leadership to facilitate this transformation.

The other day, I read a touching story about how a very poor Indian village boy struggled to come up in life, taking the benefit of education, which was otherwise beyond his reach, with the help of others. Yet, by his persistent endeavour and supported by well-meaning and visionary people, he obtained quality higher education and came up to occupy a crucial position in the scientific establishment of his country. He was among those who had migrated to the West in search of greater challenges and better opportunities for research or to quote him 'in search of walls to paint', but returned to the motherland when shown the right opportunity to excel and contribute to our own nation-building. By now you will be knowing whom I am talking about. He is none other than your Director General, Dr. Mashelkar. To my scientist-friends here I would like to remind that first and foremost start looking for solid walls within the country to paint on, to make an impact, to contribute to our own scientific growth. If every student of science gets proper guidance and encouragement and opportunities, as Dr. Mashelkar has shown, and is driven by an urge to excel and to contribute to the national weal, we will be able to transform every institution of learning and research into world-class ones which can attract and accommodate all our talents and utilise them in the service of our country. I would like to visualise the CSIR taking the lead role and becoming a catalyst in this endeavour.

I am sure, our scientists, under the able leadership of the dynamic Minister, 'ill take on this challenge and become effective agents in the gigantic task f transforming India into a knowledge-driven, modern, developed country. would once again like to thank Shri Kapil Sibal, Dr. Mashelkar and the CSIR ommunity for giving me the opportunity to associate myself with your oundation Day Celebrations. I extend my best wishes to all of you. Before conclude, let me take this opportunity to also extend my hearty ongratulations to all those scientists who are being honoured for their cellence in science and technology. I wish you all the very best.

Thank you.

PRESERVING AND PROMOTING OUR LITERARY HERITAGE*

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to be here and to associate with this function this morning and to have the opportunity to pay my respectful tributes to the memory of late Shri Sakalchand Kalidas Patel. As a political leader and social activist, as a freedom fighter, as a legislator, as a champion of the cause of the working class in Gujarat, and as a promoter of education in Gujarat, Shri Patel had left an indelible imprint of his personality on different facets of Gujarati life. Visionary that he was, he had recognized the value of learning and the importance of transmitting our rich knowledge to the future generations. The result of that vision and commitment is what has brought us together today. I am happy to note that the Gujarat Vishvakosh Trust has taken the initiative to honour the memory of its founder, late Shri Sakalchand Kalidas Patel, by installing his bust, which I have had the honour to unveil this morning, in the Trust premises.

I was quite impressed reading about the history of the Vishvakosh Trust's evolution and growth over the last two decades. Bringing out twenty encyclopedic volumes in a vernacular Indian language is not an easy task. It takes the knowledge and wisdom of past generations and the learning and experience of a large number of contemporary scholars, from diverse fields, in preparing encyclopedias. Only with committed endeavour of everyone involved could you have accomplished this gigantic task. When we understand the fact that this is only one of their several accomplishments in the field of learning, we can appreciate better the dedication and commitment of those associated with this Trust.

The new Vishvakosh Trust building, stands as a testimony to the vision, hard work and commitment of everyone associated with this Trust, from its late founder and benefactors to the last worker here. I am sure that the new facilities to be made available with the coming up of that state-of-the-art building would give a further fillip to the educational, literary and cultural activities of the people of Gujarat. On this happy occasion, let me congratulate all those who have contributed to the evolution of the Trust as a positive manifestation of voluntary urge to serve the cause of learning and knowledge.

* At the inauguration of the new building of the Gujarat Vishvakosh Trust, Ahmedabad (30 September 2005).

Friends, for the effective dissemination of knowledge, for the sustenance of a cohesive society, for both material and moral advancement and for the successful functioning of democracy, it is important to have a society where the culture of learning is promoted. Most importantly, the people should have the means to be informed of the events and developments around them. A well-informed population is the greatest asset for a democratic society. A scientifically managed and modern information system or reservoir is the intellectual repository of a nation. If our country today is beginning to be recognized as an emerging knowledge power and a knowledge hub, this urge to learn and the desire to be informed among our people have played a vital role.

In creating an informed society, easy accessibility of knowledge to the masses in a language and format they understand and comprehend better is very important. For this nothing can be more effective than providing information in one's own mother tongue. Providing quality education is recognized as one of the primary responsibilities of the State. Equally important is to keep the people well-informed. This task is better accomplished through the various institutions and agencies of the State, the media and committed organizations and individuals. This is where the work of organizations like the Gujarat Vishvakosh Trust assumes importance.

In India, our deep urge to create and imbibe knowledge has been reflected in a wide range of literary interests, expressed in diverse linguistic traditions. Indian wisdom and knowledge display unique socio-economic, cultural and linguistic diversities. Despite this diversity, a common heritage binds us all. Unity in diversity is thus the foundation of our social and political setting.

As you all know, the Government of India has recently constituted the National Knowledge Commission to provide the road map in the frontiers of knowledge and learning for all our people. This is indeed a gigantic task, in which individuals, governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations are poised to play an important role.

It is, however, an unfortunate reality that in spite of the rich traditions of learning and the abundance of knowledge in our country, there is a perceptible dearth of quality reference sources in our native languages. Only by generating information in our native languages and by creating qualitatively better reference sources in them, can we hope to bridge the information-divide among our people and thereby mitigating the information-generated social iniquities and empowering every section of our population.

It is extremely praiseworthy that a sincere effort has been made by the Gujarat Vishvakosh Trust to address this issue in an effective manner. The Trust has, in fact, emerged as a platform for the people of Gujarat, who have

been pioneers in several literary and knowledge movements, in preserving and promoting their rich cultural and literary heritage. To my mind, initiatives taken under the aegis of the Trust epitomize the collective will of an informed citizenry and the intelligentsia to build academic capacities and stimulate study and research in a form that suits specific academic and literary orientations of the people speaking the Gujarati language.

It is certainly a commendable effort, which will benefit not only the contemporary reader but also the generations to come. More importantly, it will benefit the very large and highly enterprising Gujarati population spread across the world. They will be able to benefit from the many volumes of the Vishvakosh in their own mother tongue and come to know of the remarkable achievements of the Gujarati society.

One cannot but be impressed by the number of volumes of the Vishvakosh, which the Trust has published in such a short time. It is also heartening that the Trust is simultaneously bringing out several editions as well, updating information on various themes. It is noteworthy that the Trust is bringing out various other publications on a wide array of subjects dealing with literature, theatre, folk arts, genetics, and earthquakes, as also biographies of prominent leaders and a directory of freedom fighters. I am sure these volumes will be a mine of information on the relevant subjects.

I heartily compliment all the learned contributors, reviewers, honorary editors and others associated with these prestigious projects. Coming from Bengal, where there has been a long and rich tradition of such activities, I am particularly impressed by the accomplishments of the Trust. I sincerely hope that their achievements will encourage scholars and policy-makers both in and outside of Gujarat to undertake similar assignments in other Indian States in their native languages.

I have found that the Gujarat Vishvakosh Bhavan has all modern facilities for a seeker of knowledge. The Library, the Information Centre, the Seminar Halls, the Computer Centre and the Auditorium will all be important components of an information reservoir. I am sure that the new building, will further institutionalize the work of the Trust and enhance its capacity to conceptualize and implement its strategies for effective dissemination of information in the years to come. In realizing this, we should draw inspiration from the life and work of visionary leaders like late Shri Sakalchand Kalidas Patel. I am told that he was a great builder of bridges and dams across this region. But more than those concrete structures, which has its own role in the development of a nation, it is this great institution that he founded that will impact upon the lives of the people today and of generations to come. It is through such initiatives that we build bridges with our past, present and the

future. I wish the Trust all success in producing useful, creative and culturally rich educational products and in all its other endeavours in the service of the society. I am grateful to the Trustees of the Gujarat Vishvakosh for extending me this honour of sharing your joy on this occasion.

Thank you.

ACHIEVING MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: ROLE OF DEMOCRACY*

It is indeed a privilege for me to be in the midst of the very distinguished gathering on the occasion of the National Legal Literacy Day to discuss the role of the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. I am indebted to the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India and the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) for providing me with this opportunity of associating with this function.

At the outset, I wish to convey my felicitations to the Hon'ble Chief Justice Sabharwal, on his assumption of the highest Judicial Office in our country. With his long experience and deep and abiding faith in the constitutional set-up of the country, I have no manner of doubt that he will have a very successful tenure and I sincerely wish him well. On his assuming the high office, he has indicated that his first priority is to 'cement the faith of our one billion people in the judicial system by promoting speedy and inexpensive justice'.

I respectfully submit that all of us who are called upon to discharge constitutional duties and obligations in different spheres should be similarly guided by the primary consideration of earning the faith of our people in the discharge of our duties and also to serve them to the best of our abilities according to the constitutional mandate. In that endeavour, it is important that there should be harmonious functioning of the three pillars of parliamentary democracy so that the vital developmental goals for the nation could be achieved together.

The observance of the National Legal Literacy Day is expected to contribute significantly towards enhancing awareness of the common people about their legal rights and of the legal-aid facilities available in the country. It is vitally necessary to make such facilities available to the deserving citizens so that they can obtain redress and enjoy their rights as conferred by our Constitution. Legal literacy helps in the access to information which makes the citizens better aware of their rights in our democratic set-up. Such awareness will help in making the justice delivery system more transparent

* At the Legal Literacy Day Celebrations of the National Legal Services Authority, New Delhi (9 November 2005).

and people-oriented, particularly to the benefit of the weaker sections. In this connection, I commend the initiatives taken for the implementation of the National Legal Literacy Mission by initiating several programmes and networks and the efforts made towards legal empowerment of communities for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Vision Statement of NALSA lays down the charter of the citizens' rights to obtain redress and the objectives to be achieved.

Even after almost six decades of our Independence, nearly 300 millions of our citizens continue to live below the poverty line. A substantial section of our people live without access to safe drinking water, adequate health-care, dependable sources of energy, in poor hygienic conditions and without access to basic infrastructure necessary for a dignified existence. The benefits of modern medicine and the developments in the field of science, information and communications technologies are yet to reach large parts of the country. Nearly one-third of our citizens are yet to be extended the benefit of basic education. Only 6 per cent of the University education age-group, between 18 and 23, are actually taking the benefit of higher education in the country today. Gender-based discrimination is a major social issue still to be properly addressed. Women who constitute almost 50 per cent of our population are yet to have an effective share in the political decision-making processes, especially in our representative institutions.

In this situation, how do we achieve the Millennium Development Goals, which comprise, *inter alia*, Eradication of Poverty; Universalisation of Education and Empowerment of Women ? These are interrelated issues relevant for the empowerment of our people. In recent times, some laws passed by Parliament, namely, the Employment Guarantee Act and the Right to Information Act, have been steps in the right direction.

Our Founding Fathers, after mature consideration, have given to us a Constitution which contains the charter for our democratic set-up based on a parliamentary system of Government, in which the three organs of the State, namely, the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Executive have been assigned specific roles to play.

The visionaries who were entrusted with the drafting of the Constitution of free India, crafted a unique scheme of governance, in which the principle of 'Separation of Powers' has been amalgamated with the doctrine of 'Parliamentary Sovereignty'. Our Constitution preserves and protects the supremacy of the sovereign will of the people in our governance structure, subjecting all the organs of the State to its overriding authority. The centrality of the will of the people finds its best expression in the Preamble itself, which is the very source of all the institutions of governance. The words 'We, the people of India' and 'do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this

Constitution' recognize the sovereignty of the people and their primacy in our constitutional system and convey its eternal message. The Constitution further enumerates the powers and responsibilities of the organs of the State as the facilitators of the national weal. The relationship of the organs with one another has been clearly demarcated in purpose, intent and areas of activities, leaving hardly any scope for doubt or confusion.

The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. Substance of democracy has to be assessed in terms of the impact it makes on the quality of the life of the people.

Democracy can be sustained in the long run only if everyone involved, particularly, the three organs of the State and the constitutional functionaries nurture it with care and commitment. We must constantly seek to achieve for the people, their due entitlements, otherwise they will lose faith in democracy as a viable system capable of addressing their concerns. All institutions of governance should necessarily remain sensitive to the hopes, aspirations and urges of the people as well as their disappointments and frustrations, so that the system remains people-oriented and the priority of achieving, amongst others, the Millennium Development Goals is not lost sight of.

The Millennium Development Goals, which have been identified by the United Nations, along with the peoples' problems specific to our country, have to be brought to the centre-stage of our national endeavour. We need to recognize the fact that India lives in her villages. Long-term development of the country cannot be achieved without addressing the concerns of the agricultural sector, which still constitutes the backbone of our economy. City-centric development alone will not help in emancipating the substantial majority of our people, living in the villages, who have not been the major beneficiaries of our developmental initiatives so far.

Along with economic development, top priority has to be given to human development, if our country has to be a developed one by 2020. We need an integrated development strategy involving participation by the direct beneficiaries which calls for decentralized planning. India has enormous unexploited potential as a knowledge-hub for the world. Only through universalisation of education, laying special stress on vocational education and on the education of the girl child can we achieve true empowerment of our people.

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals has to be effected through the structure of governance as provided by our Constitution through the different organs of the State acting in consonance with their powers and duties. The Constitution and its Preamble are the guiding lights so far as the

Judiciary is concerned but there is no scope of enforcing its accountability to the Constitution, except through judicial conscience and rectitude. If any organ of the State exercises any power, having a sanction only *in terrorem*, which power under the constitutional scheme belongs to any other organ, it will cause a serious imbalance in our constitutional set-up. To my mind, the Rule of Law is at the very core of our Constitution. It should permeate the way in which we are governed. It requires that those who exercise powers should be conditioned by law and not be allowed to act in any arbitrary or unlawful manner, so that the people can obtain the protection of law as and when required. To guard against wrongful assumption or abuse of powers, a constitutional structure of power-relationship with checks and balances has been devised and safeguards provided for under our Constitution, expressly or by implication.

Thus is the importance of having a harmonious relationship among the different organs of the State. The Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India held on 20 March 2005 has emphasized that it is imperative to maintain such relation between the Legislature and the Judiciary and that the Legislature must enforce the accountability of the Executive as provided in the Constitution. It has further noted rightly that the Judiciary commands and justly deserves all the respect and dignity it enjoys and that the success of democratic governance will be greatly facilitated if the constitutional institutions respect each other's role in the national endeavour and act within their own spheres. I feel each organ should periodically assess its own performance and also should indulge in self-introspection. Let no organ find someone else to pass on the responsibility for gaps in its own performance.

I wish to compliment the National Legal Services Authority on organizing the National Conference on Legal Empowerment and for selecting the very important subject of the role of the different organs to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. I wish to convey once again my gratitude to the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India who is adorning the Chair of the Legal Services Authority for the opportunity given to me to share my thoughts with the eminent people assembled here.

Thank you.

ACTUALIZING WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHT TO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING*

I am happy to be here to inaugurate the Fourth International Congress on Women, Work and Health. It is very heartening that over eight hundred delegates from sixty countries have assembled here to discuss several important subjects. There is increasing recognition, across the globe, that the condition of women reflects the true extent of progress and development of any country. This is particularly true in the key sectors of health, education and work. This Congress will be deliberating on related issues concerning health and work sectors and is indeed very appropriate and welcome.

The condition of women varies across the globe but virtually everywhere, including in developed countries, women are disadvantaged in one way or the other. In developed countries, the problem is largely to do with the so-called 'glass ceiling' in workplaces, that discriminates against women moving to top decision-making positions. In less developed countries, the problem goes much deeper and often has to do with the societal preference for the male-child, which gets translated into institutionalized inequities faced by women in all fields.

Pervasive and persistent patriarchal attitudes, that condition the thinking and behaviour of both men and women are an unfortunate legacy, worldwide, and concerted efforts to overcome them often meet with varying, but substantial degrees of resistance. Discrimination against women may be overt or subtle, yet it works insidiously to reduce opportunities for them, thereby effectively inhibiting women from realizing their full potential.

To casual observers, it seems that women are more robust than men going by the fact that in almost all societies women outlive men, on the average. This is true even of countries like India where there is an imbalance in the sex-ratio because of the preference for the male-child and the consequent neglect of the girl-child in many households and societal segments. However, we need to go beyond this and probe as to whether the special health needs of women are adequately appreciated and understood and if they actually receive the care and attention that are called for. I am afraid not.

* At the inauguration of the Fourth Triennial International Conference on *Women Work and Health*, New Delhi (27 November 2005).

I tend to go along with the view that a distinction should not always be drawn between 'working' and 'non-working' women as it is women who, according to a famous African proverb, uphold 'half the sky', by their contribution in different spheres of life, which goes both unrecorded and unacknowledged. Let us not therefore hesitate to pay tribute to the silent and determined efforts of millions of women the world over who continue tirelessly to attend to basic needs which underpin the success of all developmental efforts.

Having said so, even if we were to accept the conventional categorization of 'working women' and slot them, as participants respectively, in the informal and formal, rural and urban sectors, there is no escaping the harsh reality that working women are burdened with the additional responsibilities of the domestic sphere, which are almost never passed on to men. This position is gradually changing in developed countries, but in less developed countries, the problem is in fact worsening because more and more women are entering the workforce.

The nature of women's work varies a great deal among countries and within countries. The exhausting work involved in walking long distances, carrying heavy loads of water and firewood, is the daily lot of many poor rural women, but it is not often seen as a major issue of women's work and health. The fact that women's work is largely in the unorganized and domestic spheres has robbed it of the attention and profile that it deserves to have. It would not be off the mark to state that this amounts to a denial of the intrinsic human right of women to health and well-being.

Much of the research work carried out in the occupational health field is with regard to organized, urban work, and therefore, large numbers of women, especially in developing countries, do not benefit from it. Among the reasons for their marginal relevance is the fact that a comprehensive view is not taken of the different roles that multi-tasking women are expected to perform, especially in situations of socio-economic deprivation and underdevelopment. In fact, other aspects such as sexual-harassment and gender-related discrimination at the work-place also need to be taken into account because of their impact on the overall health of women, including mental health. Only then will the complexity of women's work and health evoke a far more empathetic and sensitive resonance and lead to desired changes.

This is not, however, to convey the impression that all is bleak. Internationally, through instrumentalities such as the UN Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Platform for Action adopted at UN World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995, there have been expressions of strong resolve to effect a radical improvement

in the lives of women, including their work and health. In India, we are very conscious of the need to improve the status of women. The Government is committed to empowering women socially, educationally, economically and politically. Specially designed policies and programmes are in place to realize this objective. In several States in India, substantial progress has been made, as a result, in reducing female infant mortality, maternal mortality and improving female literacy and retention of girls in schools. The current emphasis is on replicating these successes in States that have been lagging behind, for various socio-cultural reasons.

We are also proud of the fact that in India we have a constitutional provision to reserve one-third of the seats in local government bodies for women, both in rural and urban areas. This is a unique achievement, world-wide. There is a proposal of extending one-third reservation to State Legislatures and Parliament as well. I am confident that the pressure from women's groups and other concerned citizens will prove to be successful in empowering women further in the political sphere in the near future.

Another area we are concentrating on is a major extension of micro-finance facilities to women's Self-Help Groups to provide them with economic empowerment, which determines to a large extent the status women enjoy in society. The experience in this regard has been extremely encouraging. We are also committed to ensure actual, and not just formal equality of women. Providing special care to the girl-child is a focus-area, too. You will be happy to note that a gender-perspective has been brought to bear on all developmental issues, with gender sensitive budgeting being introduced by the Government. All important data are being maintained in a gender-disaggregated manner to facilitate better planning and monitoring.

While the problems faced by women vary, it is nevertheless a fact that there are many commonalities across the world. Therefore a Congress like this which brings together activists and researchers in the fields of women's work and women's health from all over the world can contribute a great deal to the furtherance of women's cause in our close-knit globalized set-up and show us how to move ahead in a more purposeful, determined and coordinated manner. I have no doubt that the papers presented here and the discussions that follow would provide useful exchange of experiences, sharing of knowledge and cross-cultural insights regarding women's issues.

I have great pleasure in inaugurating the very useful Congress and wish it all success.

Thank you.

ADVANTAGES OF A CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT MODEL*

I am extremely happy to be attending the First National Convention on Cluster Development Initiatives in India and the launch of the Foundation for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Clusters. The Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, Ahmedabad showed great foresight when in June 2005, it established the Foundation for MSME Clusters, with technical support from the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO). The creation of the Foundation has come not a day too soon.

As India integrates itself into the world economy, it is faced with a need to develop Clusters, providing specialized products and services, and successfully competing with other such Clusters globally. With the virtual obliteration of national boundaries, thanks to the ever-increasing speed of transport and communication, each nation is leveraging its strengths and creating a niche for itself in the Global Value Chain. This can be achieved through the Cluster Approach in which national resources, entrepreneurial skills and labour are harnessed, with a mission to excel in a given product or service.

I wish to congratulate Dr. Y.K. Alagh, founder Chairperson of the Foundation for Micro, Small and Medium Clusters and the other Trustees of the Foundation, for establishing a non-profit making body that will act as a Resource Centre for Cluster development in India, and seek to galvanise economic growth in the micro, small and medium enterprises.

The progress of human civilization, has been characterized by the ever-increasing division of labour and specialization of functions, in different fields of human endeavour, and Clusters epitomize that quest for specialization.

The Cluster-based Development Model has several advantages: (i) it is a focused approach to produce highly specialized goods and services, with emphasis on the highest possible value addition; (ii) it brings together the managerial and productive skills of individual units and works collectively,

* At the launch of the Foundation for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Clusters, New Delhi (1 December 2005).

to improve the Cluster's bargaining capacity *vis-a-vis* the others'; (iii) the creation of common facilities and infrastructure, ensures optimal utilization of resources; (iv) it holds great promise for employment generation and export promotion; (v) it results in geographical dispersal of economic units across the length and breadth of the country; (vi) it focuses on decentralized and localized management of resources; (vii) it can make a positive impact on poverty alleviation and gender equity by supporting activities of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the Traditional sectors such as weaving & spinning, handicrafts, animal husbandry, agro-processing and the like; and (viii) it holds potential for regeneration of rural and urban areas.

The cluster approach also has significant advantage for balanced growth across all regions of our great country. It is necessary to set up clusters for different economic activities on the basis of the comparative advantages offered by different regions. Such dispersal of investment, can be an effective antidote to the regional imbalances that characterize our economic growth.

In India, Banaglore's growth as an IT Cluster or Gurgaon's growth as a BPO Cluster are just two of the recent examples of the success of the Cluster approach in the services sector. While Firozabad has, for long, been famous for its glassware, Kolkata for its leather goods, Muradabad for its brassware, Ludhiana for its bicycles, Tiruppur for readymade garments, there are hundreds of other new Clusters appearing on the horizon and they need to be nurtured. Internationally, if a shining example of successful Cluster development is in China, with the growth centres of Guangzou, Shanghai and Beijing alone accounting for the lion's share of China's exports, we should try to learn from such examples.

Realising the multiple benefits of the Cluster Approach, the Government and other public and private institutions are laying increasing emphasis on the Cluster-based Development Model. The Ministries of Small Scale Industry, Commerce & Industries, Science & Technology, Textiles and the State Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, Orissa, West Bengal and public institutions like the NABARD have evinced keen interest in effectively implementing it.

The Cluster-based Model of Development, I understand, derives its theoretical underpinnings from Michael E Porter's work on the 'Competitive Advantage of Nations' in which he stressed that to get a slice of the global market, each nation has to focus on some selected products and services, which it can produce at the most competitive cost and with the highest quality. In a competitive global scenario, each country must therefore find a niche for itself, which is possible through the Cluster Approach.

For our Micro and Small Enterprises, the Cluster approach offers a comprehensive solution to the typical impediments faced by them. Collective action on their part leads to establishment of common facility centres, common brand-building for the export market, common purchase obligations, optimum resource utilization, etc. Clusters, therefore, are the best example of the adage 'Unity is Strength'.

In India, the existence of a large number of MSME Clusters — nearly 400 industrial ones and about 4,000 artisan ones — testify to their growing popularity. It is being recognized that Cluster-based initiatives have tremendous capacity for employment creation and export generation, poverty alleviation and for promoting gender equality. We must strive to set up Clusters in each and every district of the country, which could lead to the multiple spin off benefits associated with them.

Following UNIDO's intervention a decade ago, almost 70 Organizations/ Institutions are involved in Cluster Development Programmes in the country today. While some are actually implementing the cluster-based programmes, the others are performing the role of facilitators. It is only understandable that these organizations are following different approaches and adopting different methodologies. While some organizations are laying overriding emphasis on technology upgradation, others are emphasizing credit facilitation and marketing. There is, therefore, a need to study the different approaches so as to develop appropriate solutions for the development and promotion of Clusters.

In India, today, Clusters are at different stages of development. While some are enjoying robust health and competing globally, others need a dose of 'Induced Development and Growth' to acquire a competitive edge. Here, the requirement of assistance may not necessarily be in terms of subsidies for commercial activities but in terms of awareness generation, developing Cluster vision in Cluster-based action plans, creation of common facilities, common branding and marketing facilities, formation of networks, strengthening industry associations, capacity building of the Cluster actors and the like.

It is here that the Foundation for MSME Clusters can provide an important platform for different Cluster actors to come together, at regular intervals, to share their experiences and to take stock of their developmental interventions. Such interactions will help create a repository of knowledge of best practices nationally and internationally, and help to develop a comprehensive vision and blue print for development of Clusters in the country.

The Foundation for MSME Cluster can play a pioneering role as a 'Think Tank' for micro, small and medium enterprises and offer valuable technical assistance to Cluster units in India and overseas. I am happy to learn that the

growing Indian expertise in Cluster development has begun to get international recognition and Indian experts are being invited to share their knowledge in countries such as France, Thailand, Pakistan, Cambodia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia. This is a trend that has to be assiduously fostered.

I am confident that apart from learning and benchmarking best practices in this field, the Foundation will also endeavour to create new knowledge in the field of Cluster development. It could sensitize policy makers and planners to help them evolve an enabling environment and policy framework, under which clusters of globally competitive MSMEs can thrive. The Foundation could also provide policy inputs to the Government and private institutions in this vital field.

India needs to empower its women folk. While lakhs of Self Help Groups, comprising mostly women, have been formed in the rural areas of our country over the last decade, most of them have been unable to establish themselves as self-sustaining, surplus-generating units. While in some case, it is inadequate capital base that hinders their economic activity, in others, it is poor training and inferior product quality. Lack of marketing linkages is a universal problem affecting them all. There is need for an in-depth analysis of the impediments and for the designing of a comprehensive solution for the SHGs, which is workable and replicable.

I would be very happy if the Foundation could devote some of its time to address these vital issues that impinge on the lives of lakhs of our rural women. Perhaps, a Federation or Cluster of SHGs could be formed, on an experimental basis, which could be piloted under the technical assistance of the Foundation. The Foundation's meaningful intervention in this area would be immensely valuable, as it would also be vicariously addressing the larger issue of gender equity and women's empowerment.

I have learnt that during the day, you have had fruitful interaction on different aspects of the Cluster Development Model, in which policy makers, planners, bankers and Cluster practitioners have participated. Case studies and success stories have been presented, providing valuable insights into the implementation of the Cluster Initiatives. I am sure that your deliberations of today and tomorrow will provide the right answers to the issues facing the Conference.

In this work of seminal importance, there is ample scope for the public and private sectors to collaborate and create a unique synergy for the development of Clusters in the micro, small and medium enterprises. I only hope that keeping in mind the larger reality of the country, you will give importance to the Cluster initiatives in rural India also. That is where Cluster initiatives can make a direct and positive impact on ordinary lives.

Once again, I thank Dr. Alagh for having invited me to this important ccasion. I extend my best wishes to the Foundation for MSME Clusters, as starts on what can be called a long and momentous journey of creating pportunities for small entrepreneurs to generate wealth, improve livelihoods ıd to competitively leverage our collective entrepreneurial energies in the lobal arena.

Thank you and All the Best in all your endeavours.

THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION*

I am happy to be here to inaugurate the Seminar on the *Problem of Illegal Migration* in India organised by the Citizen Rights Preservation Committee of Assam. The theme of the Seminar, which has a special focus on the fall-out of the repeal of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983, is extremely important as it focuses on an issue which has defied both a definition and a solution for decades.

The issue of illegal or undocumented migration is one of the most serious problems throughout the world. In our country, some people claim that more than 10 million foreign nationals are living in different States illegally. I do not want to go into the veracity of this claim. I am sure, the participants will have statistics and fact-sheets to prove or disprove the claim. I am, however, concerned about the way the issue has been politicised at great human costs. As it is believed, migrations take place under conditions of hardship, either caused by economic factors or political circumstances. Both by historical factors associated with our freedom movement and the partition of the country, the issue of migration assumed special significance throughout our post-Independence years.

The Governments under such circumstances are mandated both under our Constitution and under international law, to view the issue of migration, legal or illegal, with a broad humanitarian perspective and treat people with dignity providing the protection of law irrespective of religious, linguistic and other considerations and deal with the problem of illegal migration according to the law of the land. Violence or intolerance will in no way help find a lasting solution to such issues involving, in most cases, people who are living on the fringes, whichever nationalities they belong to.

While taking suitable precautionary measures against the unrestricted migration from foreign lands, in my view, a more liberal humanitarian approach should be adopted in dealing with cases where nationality question is difficult to establish. In the name of illegal migrants, our own citizens, regardless of their regional, linguistic or religious identities, should not be put to any disadvantage.

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* At the inauguration of the Seminar on *The Problem of Illegal Migration in India* organised by the Citizen Rights Preservation Committee of Assam, New Delhi (4 December 2005).

Under the Foreigners Act, if one was alleged to be a foreigner by the authorities, the burden of proving that he was not a foreigner was on him. This was an impossible burden to discharge for most of the people in the country, particularly for those who had no birth certificate or land holding. Taking note of all these problems, our Parliament enacted the Illegal Migrants (Determination of Tribunals) (IMDT) Act in 1983 which provided for Judicial Tribunals to determine disputes about citizenship, particularly in Assam.

The IMDT Act which came into force at the height of the Assam agitation over the alleged large-scale influx of foreigners into the State of Assam was expected to address the problem in a manner causing minimum inconvenience to the citizens. However, the Supreme Court, in a recent judgment, has struck down this Act, leaving a void in this important area of concern for many citizens. The decision of the apex Court itself makes it very clear that the problem of illegal migrants needs to be dealt with separately in a purposeful manner.

The Union Government has set up a Group of Ministers to look into the important matter in the context of the decision of the apex Court. We hope, the Group of Ministers, after hearing various views of concerned individuals, organizations and authorities on the matter, would come out with concrete proposals to advise the Government on what is needed to be done to deal with the problem effectively.

Policy solutions regarding illegal migration depend upon the existing conditions which in turn depend upon various social, economic and political factors as also on India's relations with our neighbouring countries. Infiltration can be minimised to a great extent by fencing and more vigilance by our Border Security Forces with the help of the local people.

In this context, I would also like to emphasise that we cannot lose sight of the humanitarian angle while addressing the challenges of migration. It is with a sense of disquiet that one recalls the tragic and traumatic events in several parts of the North-Eastern region, particularly Assam, which took place in the 1980s. The Assam agitation was a turning point in the political history of the region. Even when one agrees that illegal migration is indeed a serious menace not just in economic terms but also from a security point of view, we cannot, in my humble view, be totally unconcerned about the human dimensions of the problem.

Political parties, civil society groups, voluntary organizations, the academic community, the media—all have to join hands in ensuring that we do not cross the limits of Rule of Law and violate human rights/commitments when we try to solve the problem of what is generally referred to as illegal migration. Organizations like the Citizen Rights Preservation Committee of Assam have

an important role to play in mobilizing public opinion, creating awareness, educating the people and securing the rights of all in such trying times.

I appreciate the initiative taken by the Citizen Rights Preservation Committee of Assam in organizing this Seminar. I hope concrete recommendations emerging from the deliberations here will help the Government and the people to find a lasting and acceptable solution to the issue. With these words, I am happy to inaugurate the Seminar.

Thank you.

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES FACING INDIA*

It is indeed my pleasure to join you this morning at this Lecture on a theme of very topical concern for all of us, Children's Development: Challenges Facing India, in the Lecture Series being organized for the Members of Parliament. As you would recall, we had initiated this Lecture Series in August this year with a view to providing the parliamentarians a forum for a more informal and closer interaction with experts and subject specialists on a wide range of issues. We have already had three Lectures in this Series and the results have really been encouraging. Besides being very useful and informative, these Lectures have been found to be helpful in further sensitizing and motivating the members in addressing various contemporary problems facing our society today.

This morning, we have with us Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, to speak to us about the challenges facing children's development. Ms. Veneman has been an articulate leader in international trade and development and has championed programmes to reduce world hunger and strengthen the food-producing capacity of developing nations before she was entrusted with the onerous task of leading the UNICEF. With its network in 157 countries across the globe, the UNICEF has indeed been the pioneer in activities relating to children's welfare. The UNICEF's avowed mission to advance the Millennium Development Goals by supporting child health and nutrition, by providing quality basic education for all boys and girls, by enabling access to clean water and sanitation, and by protecting children from violence, exploitation and AIDS, speaks volumes of its commitment to make the world a better place for our children to grow up and realize their full potential. Under your leadership, Ms. Veneman, we trust that the UNICEF would help realize the Millennium Development Goals insofar as our children are concerned, so that all children have the right to actualize their potential, in all situations, all the time, and everywhere.

Friends, India is home to four hundred and twenty-seven million children who are the wealth of our nation, and indeed our most important asset and human resource. Our Constitution guarantees several rights to the children,

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* At the Lecture Series for Members of Parliament on *Children's Development: Challenges Facing India*, organized by the BPST, New Delhi (9 December 2005).

including equality before law, free and compulsory primary education, and prohibition of trafficking and forced labour and employment of children below the age of 18 years in factories, mines or hazardous occupations. The National Policy for Children, which we adopted in 1974, has been the basis for many of our schemes and programmes for children's welfare. Our Parliament has played a pivotal role by enacting several legislations to ensure the protection of our children's rights and for their fuller development. We are also a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

However, we all agree that much more remains to be done. The indicators on child development in our country are not to our satisfaction. Child labour which deprives children of their childhood and their dignity and which is detrimental to their health, education, and more importantly, in developing their capabilities, is an issue which requires to be addressed by us more earnestly. Poverty, hunger, various forms of abuse, exploitation and maltreatment are matters of serious concern.

The National Plan of Action for Children, 2005, provides a road-map for steps to be taken for the improvement of the conditions of our children. We are also in the process of setting up a National Commission as well as State Commissions for Children for the proper enforcement of their rights and for the effective implementation of laws relating to them. The Commission for the Protection of Child Rights Bill to give effect to these measures is already before the Parliament.

However, as we know, legislation alone is not enough in addressing such issues. Some issues are linked to the levels of economic developments, to poverty, to certain social attitudes, among other things. Along with legislations, it is important to help change the attitude of the society at large through education. The society has to have, as among its larger concern, the need to protect the children's rights and interests. We have to ensure that plans and policies for children's welfare are implemented within a specified and acceptable time-frame.

Realizing the importance of adequate inputs from the legislators, we have decided to constitute a Parliamentary Forum on Children with the hope that it will facilitate particular attention to come from the parliamentarians and through them of the society as a whole towards critical issues affecting our children's well-being. This, we believe, will help the members of Parliament in highlighting children's issues, and in fostering effective strategic partnerships with all stakeholders, including the civil society, in addressing the challenges in child development.

We cannot see the child protection issues in isolation. First and foremost, the world should be united in addressing the developmental concerns of the

less developed countries and thus empower them to deal with country-specific problems among which issues affecting children occupy an important place. To my mind, most of the issues affecting children and other disadvantageously placed could be addressed by focussing on developmental problems as such which should be the collective responsibility of the whole world. This challenge is to be jointly faced by all of us — parliamentarians, decision-makers, the civil society, and more importantly, the UNICEF.

Friends, we have gathered here today with a commitment to our children, the human resource of tomorrow. Needless to say, there is no issue more vital to humanity and its future than the full development of our children. The needs and the rights of the children all around the world must be accorded top priority in all developmental efforts. With these words, I now give the floor to Ms. Ann Veneman to share her views and experiences on the subject.

Thank you.

I am thankful to Justice A.S. Anand for inviting me here on this very significant day. Human Rights Day is being observed all over the world, as indeed it should be, and even though we share the anxiety that not enough is being done to ensure that our fellow citizens are able to exercise in fullest measure the rights that are theirs, we can reflect, on this day, on the enormity of the problem.

We all know that, through the ages, scant respect has been paid to the rights of individuals and to their dignity as human beings by rulers who have been despotic or, if benign, like Akbar, rulers nonetheless. The great empires of those times had rested on the oppression and suffering of thousands and thousands in our country, and on their toil, the fruit of which brought the colonising power immense wealth. Some rulers did give their subjects limited rights and some freedom to move freely in the realm, to trade and carry on their activities, and so on. But all this was by the kindness and at the pleasure of the monarch; it was never a right, always only a privilege.

We also know only too well that in the 17th, 18th, 19th and for part of the last century colonialism ravaged the world, exploiting people, because they were poor and weak. The colonising powers made no attempt to hide their intentions; they made no professions of concern for the rights of the individuals in the countries over which they ruled. They saw them as inferior, declared them to be inferior quite openly, and whatever concessions and benefits they granted them, they did out of their perceived notion of altruism and benevolent patronage. Basic rights were granted, as jagirs were granted to loyal servants. Indeed, on the gates of the imposing Central Secretariat buildings — specifically, on a gate of the North Block — is still inscribed an admonition to the people of India. It says: 'Freedom does not descend to a people; a people must raise themselves up to freedom. It is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed'. In a real sense, this embodied the beliefs and the mindset of the colonisers. They, the colonizers had all the rights and freedoms they needed, they enjoyed a life of dignity but the colonised people, those millions of individuals who lived their lives with their families and loved ones, who also had aspirations to live with some dignity, they had to 'earn' it.

* At the function on the Human Rights Day, New Delhi (10 December 2005).

The terrible carnage of World War II, and the slaughter of over 6 million Jews, apart from the enormous loss of life on both sides, led to the adoption by the United Nations of the Declaration of Human Rights, but it also ushered in perhaps an age, the age in which we now live, that has been marked by a dark feature not present in the earlier ages. That feature is lack of sincerity and commitment: In a very real sense the tragedy of the adoption of the Declaration of Human Rights has been its consistent and blatant violation, usually accompanied by affirmations of the value the violators place on human rights.

We have seen what has been happening in Iraq; we have seen other instances of the brazen invasion of other countries by those that have taken it on themselves to act as the policemen of the world. And all these instances of oppression are declared to be out of a concern for freedom and the dignity of individuals, out of their concern for human rights!

In India, we made human rights the core and focus of our Constitution; the Fundamental Rights of citizens have been enshrined in it, and over the years they have been further protected by a series of pronouncements by the Supreme Court. Not only do we have the Fundamental Rights, we also have the Directive Principles of State Policy, all of which come from the endeavour of those who framed the Constitution to protect the innate dignity of each citizen of the country. Through the years there have been a number of laws passed by Parliament that are intended to uphold the rights of individuals, particularly those who have been victims of oppression, discrimination, exploitation and injustice. Laws relating to workers, to women, children and those belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes are some of them, all stemming from a concern felt in Parliament for the dignity and rights of such people and groups.

One of the results of this concern is the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in 1993, and it is a matter of great satisfaction to learn of the admirable work the Commission has done in all these years. There has been hard and dedicated work by the Commission, and they have also candidly observed that : 'The Commission cannot say that it is satisfied with its handling of the complaints before it. Delays can and do occur at various stages of the processing of complaints and it will be essential constantly to review and seek improvements to the quality and working methods employed by the Commission'. I wish the Commission all the very best and, no doubt, they will continue with the dedicated work they have taken up.

I am sure everyone present here will agree that the issue of human rights is a very complex matter in this vast and varied land and the deprivation or

denial of rights to many hundreds of thousands is mired in rigid social conventions and in economic conditions that have not, sadly, changed for centuries. I am aware that the Commission and similar bodies in States have been taking some steps to create awareness among people, but the task is so enormous that it needs something like a nation-wide campaign sustained over years for there to have some effect. Still there are instances where the dignity of the human being is denied, and trampled upon. Women continue to be oppressed and exploited, treated with harshness and cruelty, and such cases in which redress is obtained are pitifully few in number. Apart from social diseases, on the economic front, we have the continuing exploitation of children who are used as labour in many village enterprises and in our towns and cities. They are paid, if at all, a pittance, given nowhere near the kind of food they need, and work long hours. Occasionally some of them are rescued by the authorities or by some voluntary organisation. But for the few who are, how many more still remain in the grip of this heartless exploitation.

The biggest factor that leads to all this is, of course, poverty which drives children to work when they should be in school, and they are kept at work often by their parents who either need the money the children earn or see the child being put to work as one less mouth to feed at home. We have had tragic reports of impoverished workers from Orissa who are picked up by labour contractors and shipped to other States for seasonal work. They are paid miserably low wages, kept in appallingly squalid conditions, not given medical aid, and left to fend for themselves for food which they often do not get, as the wages they are paid simply are not enough. A number of them die every year but the others have to go back again to this harsh, exploitative work, or face starvation.

When we became free, and we gave ourselves a Constitution, we looked forward to a democracy where everyone would be able to enjoy the rights that each human being, each citizen, is entitled to. True, it would take time, but we hoped that it would not be long before true democracy, which is the equal enjoyment of basic human rights by all, would be ushered in. Today, over half a century later, it is a matter of deep concern and anxiety to us all that we have not been able to give to our people those basic rights that are theirs. It is not that there have not been enough laws enacted; it is not that Parliament has not been vigilant in matters of exploitation and oppression. The National Human Rights Commission has also set some admirable examples and taken firm action and has been, if I may say so, a bulwark in the midst of communal bigotry and violence, raising its voice against human rights violation wherever it has occurred.

But it needs to be repeated that the problem is so vast and so deep-rooted that concerted nation-wide action is the only way, it seems, to develop an

active awareness of the crucial importance of preserving and protecting these rights. We have seen only recently the shocking events in Jehanabad, in Bihar. It reveals where the illness really is. Again, it is in poverty which leads to exploitation.

It is indeed true that most of the unrest that is now taking place in different parts of the country has its origin in the denial of rights to one group or the other. We have seen that, sometimes there is somewhat disproportionate use of force to control situations of unrest. As Gandhiji said, 'True democracy or the *Swaraj* of the masses can never come through untruthful or violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated *ahimsa*.'

An important aspect here is the effectiveness of the reddressal mechanisms against specific instances of violations of human rights. Though NHRC is mandated to look into them, it is not expected to be a substitute for the regular justice-delivery system in the country. This is where the effectiveness of the existing justice-delivery system comes into the picture. Delay in providing justice is also a violation of individual's rights. It undermines the credibility of our judicial system itself. It is, therefore, of utmost importance for us to evolve ways and means to provide speedy justice to our people.

To ensure that the citizens of this country enjoy the basic rights to which they are entitled, a relentless campaign has to be waged against poverty, and together with it, against illiteracy. I do not mean that we should be content only with making people literate. Literacy has come to mean merely the ability somehow to write one's name, and to read the alphabet, slowly and painfully. To my mind that is not literacy. Literacy is more than that, it is education, the ability to think. When that comes to people they themselves will take up the task of ensuring the human rights that are theirs under the Constitution and under the law.

I cannot stress too much on the urgency of this endeavour. The National Human Rights Commission has been doing and will continue to do excellent work. What is needed to augment their pioneering work is the generation of a whole movement — among our children, among our young people, and among all those, rich and poor, in all walks of life who value their freedom — a movement to create a positive and active awareness of the rights each individual has, the dignity of a human being that is everyone's birthright. And not just an awareness, but a resolve to stamp out all practices, customs and activities that deprive any individual of these rights. When such a movement is generated and sustained we can hope that the exploitative and

oppressive social and economic practices which still exist in our country will gradually fade away. Instituions of democracy have to be facilitators in this endeavour.

Today it is befitting that we who value our democracy remember those among us who, though our fellow citizens, are not really free, and do not have those rights that we enjoy. Let us work towards ensuring that they too join the band of truly free Indians. The task is daunting but must be faced with resolution and a steadfast dedication. We owe it to them, and it is fitting that on this day we dedicate ourselves once again to this task. 'Where the mind is without fear,' the poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote, 'and the head is held high, Where knowledge is free...' That indeed is the India that we would all like to see, that we need to strive to bring about.

Thank you.

COMBATING NATURAL DISASTERS*

As we all know, our part of the world is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. In the last one year, we have had to confront the Tsunami, earthquakes, floods and cyclones. Our region is also prone to drought. It is against this backdrop that the subject we are going to deliberate on in this Plenary assumes importance. Such interactive sessions, I believe, enable us to share our views and experiences and make collective efforts to address the problems faced by our nations. As I said earlier, the proposal mooted by Bangladesh at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Malta in November 2005 for the setting up of a Commonwealth Natural Disaster Management Programme is indeed a very welcome idea. Initiatives such as these emerge out of regular interactions among the decision-makers, policy planners, elected representatives and other functionaries at different levels which can go a long way in helping us tackle the challenges before us in a more efficacious manner.

Distinguished Delegates, to deliver the Keynote Address on the theme at this Plenary, we have with us Shri Shivraj V. Patil, Hon'ble Minister of Home Affairs, Government of India. Shri Shivraj Patil needs no introduction to the CPA fraternity. He has been one of my very illustrious predecessors, as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha from 1991 to 1996. In that capacity, he has led several Parliamentary Delegations to CPA Conferences. During his tenure as the Speaker, Shri Patil also successfully organised the 37th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New Delhi in September 1991, the 89th IPU Conference in April 1993, the Sixth Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar in January 1994, and the First Conference of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians in 1995.

The Union Home Ministry which Shri Shivraj Patil heads today, is the nodal Ministry insofar as disaster management in our country is concerned. He has taken several initiatives to equip the related agencies under his Ministry to cope with natural disasters and take prompt remedial, relief and rehabilitation measures. Shri Patil successfully piloted the Natural Disaster Management Bill, 2005 in the ongoing Session of our Parliament. I may mention here that Shri Patil has also had first hand and direct experience of

* At the Plenary Session on *Tackling Natural Disasters in the Region: Need for Synergic Efforts Among the Nations of the Region*, Second India and Asia Regions CPA Conference, New Delhi (17 December 2005).

overseeing the relief and rehabilitation operations in Latur, which was his parliamentary constituency, when it was ravaged by an earthquake in September 1993 in which thousands of people were killed.

We are indeed grateful that in spite of his busy schedule, Shri Patil has made it convenient to deliver the Keynote Address on the crucial subject of tackling natural disasters in the region and the imperative for synergic efforts among our countries. I trust that his Keynote Address will stimulate very fruitful and purposive deliberations on this important subject. With these words, I now request the Hon'ble Union Home Minister Shri Shivraj Patil to deliver his Keynote Address.

ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ENSURING CHILDREN'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT*

This morning, we are going to take up the subject, *viz. 'Tackling the Problems of Development facing Children and the Role of Parliament.'*

Children suffer a great deal in most parts of the world due to poverty, ignorance and lack of educational opportunities. They also suffer from many social and economic handicaps. On another plane, children also have to bear the brunt of man-made disasters such as war, terrorism, societal conflicts, etc. Undoubtedly, in the face of such heavy odds, children tend to lose the best part of their lives, and in the process, their sublime innocence. That being so, we need to come together to make the lives of our children brighter and better.

I believe that all of us have a great responsibility towards children who are the most valuable asset of our nations. It is imperative that their childhood is protected, their rights preserved and their future safeguarded. Areas like health care and quality education should remain the utmost priority. Governments should invest in education, health and nutrition for our children which will in effect be investment for national development.

We are indeed fortunate that to deliver the Keynote Address on the subject today, we have with us Shri Arjun Singh, the Hon'ble Union Minister of Human Resource Development, and one of India's seniormost leaders, an outstanding parliamentarian and an accomplished administrator. He has been in public life for five decades and has contributed substantially towards enriching our national life. He started his legislative career in 1957; over the years, he has adorned important positions in Government as Chief Minister, Union Minister and Governor. Children's welfare and education have always been areas which attracted the special attention of Shri Arjun Singhji.

I may mention here that realising the importance of children's growth and development, the Government of India had created a separate Department to look into all aspects of children's welfare in 1985 and this Department is under the Ministry of Human Resource Development headed by

* At the Plenary Session on *Tackling the Problems of Development facing Children and the Role of Parliaments* at the Second India and Asia Regions CPA Conference, New Delhi (18 December 2005).

Shri Arjun Singhji. Children being the future citizens of the country, their upbringing and growth is of great importance for the development of the nation as a whole. Shri Arjun Singhji has taken a number of initiatives for the uplift and welfare of our children. One such initiative that merits mention here is the National Plan of Action for Children, 2005, which has an inclusive and holistic approach to the issues encompassing the survival, growth, development and protection of all our children. I may also mention that the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Bill when enacted will provide for the constitution of a National Commission and States Commissions for the protection of child rights. We have also launched a Parliamentary Forum on Children only very recently. As a matter of fact, an interactive discussion session for our Members of Parliament on the theme 'Children's Development: Challenges Facing India' was organised by our Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training on 9 December 2005 with the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Ann Veneman.

It is ironic that although we have achieved self-sufficiency in food, malnutrition and under-nutrition still persist among our children. We must correct this kind of an anomaly and it is in confronting challenges like this that members of Parliament can play a proactive role in budgetary allocation and in the implementation of policies and programmes for the welfare of children. I look forward to meaningful suggestions coming out of the discussions here today.

I now request the Hon'ble Minister of Human Resource Development, Shri Arjun Singhji, to deliver the Keynote Address on the theme.

Thank you.

ASIATIC SOCIETY: A TREASURE HOUSE OF CULTURE AND HISTORY*

I deem it an honour to have been invited to inaugurate the Foundation Day celebrations of the Asiatic Society. On this occasion, I would like to pay my tributes to those who contributed to the Institution's intellectual consolidation since its founding in 1784, in particular, those who steered the Society in the initial stages, braving serious opposition of those who mattered in the India Office.

A nation and its people, especially a millennia-old civilization like India, has every reason to preserve and protect its rich and varied traditions in language and literature, art and architecture, its history and traditions, customs and values. In every country's history, there comes a time when there is an enhanced intellectual and artistic engagement which tends to define that nation's achievements in a very special way. Generations to come, people will refer to that as the 'golden period' when the country excelled in diverse fields. Historians will record in minute details the accomplishments for posterity to cherish. With our civilizational heritage, India has experienced the highs of intellectual and artistic achievements many times over in its history. Our diversity and plurality have added to this historical developments, evincing keen interest and also bringing encomiums from far and wide.

For centuries, people from across the world have been drawn to India's heritage, and many have sought to partake in our many-splendoured contributions to world history. Even during the colonial times, our people preserved and protected our heritage, and many connoisseurs from far and wide joined us in this onerous task. In the process, those who came seeking to have a feel of Indianness in all its manifestations also spread the message of the wonder that is India across the world. The Asiatic Society occupies a pride of place in our esteem in this context.

The Asiatic Society emerged out of the Scottish Enlightenment which believed in the theory of comparative civilization in contrast with the theory of hierarchical civilization of the British Enlightenment. If we attempt a careful study of the evolution of the Society, we can make out the extent to which the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment remained significant. For example,

* At the Foundation Day Celebrations of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata (15 January 2006).

the Society did not openly endorse the empire-building agenda of the British. Those who were at the helm of affairs never lost sight of the primary goal of the Society, which was the expansion of interest in and critical analysis of ancient Indian texts. This objective was largely achievable, partly because the intellectual giants who sustained the spirit of the Society in those formative years never chose to dilute the goal for which the Society was instituted. There was also an underlying assumption that by expressing their interest in the ancient Indian texts, those who spearheaded the empire-building agenda sought to create an indigenous support base.

Over the next few decades, the Asiatic Society evolved as a pioneering institution not only in the dissemination of knowledge but also in creating an independent space for the well-developed, but neglected, literature of the Orient. It is true that its roots were located in the early colonialism and there was a paternalistic tinge in its creation. In fact, as the available sources suggest, which all of you are well aware of, Warren Hastings played a crucial role in founding the Asiatic Society in Bengal. Persuaded by the intellectual depth of Oriental knowledge, Hastings, in his evidence before the House of Commons, challenged the view that 'native Indians are in the state of complete moral turpitude and live in the constant and unrestrained commission of every vice and crime that can disgrace human nature'. To be fair, Hastings, though an advocate of British imperialism otherwise, asserted that this description was 'entirely untrue and wholly unfounded'.

While Hastings was favourably disposed towards the Oriental treasure, contemporary scholars who were nurtured in the Enlightenment tradition of Europe took up Indian studies. Among the scholars who became emotionally attached to India was Sir William Jones who founded the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784. In his inaugural address to the Society, he said: 'India...has ever been esteemed the nurse of sciences, the inventress of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the production of human genius, abounding in natural wonders and infinitely diversified in the forms of religion and government, in the laws, manners, customs and languages, well as in the feature and complexions of men'.

William Jones steered the Society during its difficult periods and provided a foundation so solid that it survived all trials and tribulations for more than two centuries and continues to remain a significant repository of society, history and culture even today. No doubt, these efforts contributed to reviving interest in India's ancient culture both among the Europeans and the Indians themselves at that time. It is a remarkable achievement that even without receiving any financial assistance from the British government, the Asiatic Society gradually evolved as the nodal centre of Historical, Archaeological, Medical, Geological, Indological, Sinological, Tibetan, Arabic, Persian,

Anthropological, and other areas of humanistic and scientific research in India. The fact that, even under conditions of extreme financial difficulties, in the years preceding Independence, the Society sustained its research interests, its library and its prestigious Journal, without in any way compromising on quality and objectivity speaks volumes about its commitment to its founding principles. Its painstakingly produced volumes, the *Bibliotheca Indica,* is an invaluable addition to the world of learning.

The mission for which the Asiatic Society was founded was carried forward by William's successors, and in particular by HT Colebrooke. Colebrooke's contribution to 'the Sanskrit renaissance' is phenomenal since it led to renewed interest in Sanskrit, both as a language and literature. Colebrooke's treatise on *'Sanskrit and Prakrit Languages'* was the first attempt to enumerate the works composed for the elucidation of Sanskrit grammar from the earliest period to modern times.

Apart from his interests in Sanskrit and astronomy, Colebrooke also made attempts to provide an intellectual history of India. He believed that a nation's history is more than a history of its Government and that in order to understand the evolution of 'the intellect of a nation', one has to grapple with the literature and other kinds of intellectual expositions of various historical periods. This notion of history came close to the modern notion of history in which the people rather than their masters occupy a central role. Colebrooke was perhaps the first to devote his attention to sources other than inscriptions and ancient literature and in the process he discovered a large number of copper-plates of the Pala kings in Dinajpur that helped him reconstruct a relatively unknown period of history.

The tradition continued even after Colebrooke. During Horace Wilson's tenure, the Society became clearly liberal in conferring honorary membership on scholars of other countries, but also in accepting learned contributions from non-British scholars. His initiatives in preparing an analytical summary of the contents of *Vishnu Puran* contributed significantly in promoting critical study of the *Puranas.* The translation of the *slokas* of the *Puranas* on his initiative, immensely helped both the contemporary scholars and the posterity. *Puranas* have thus become an important source of history of a period that escaped the notice of serious scholars.

Wilson thus initiated a new trend in history writing on the basis of typical indigenous sources. Even the contemporary historians take Wilson's interpretation of *Puranas* as 'authentic'. The Society gained in importance during this period largely due to Wilson's personal interest in the ancient Indian literature, especially in Sanskrit and Persian. What was remarkable about Wilson was his interest in scientific subjects as well, including in Geology. During this time, I gather that the Society's museum overflowed

with specimens in natural history and other articles from practically all over the world. Wilson thus provided a wider canvas for the Asiatic Society by opening up many fields of enquiry for Indian scholarship.

Wilson had prepared the ground and also inspired James Princep who ushered in what may have been termed as the golden period of the Asiatic Society. Despite severe financial crunch, Princep supported several publications. His contribution in the field of numismatics and historical methodology was also indeed praiseworthy. By 1834, when the Society reached its Golden Jubilee, it had contributed to Oriental history in two significant ways: first, by chronicling the past, it had made the world increasingly aware of India's rich cultural past, and secondly, it had inspired the foundation of many similar Societies in India and abroad. Princep's comment, 'The tree which was auspiciously planted by the great Sir William Jones... has spread its roots in distant lands, where the cultivation of art is better understood and the value of its produce can be more skillfully developed', amply testifies to the importance of the work accomplished through the Asiatic Society.

If we look at the track record of the Society in the decades that followed, we can clearly discern its significant role in bringing to life India's ancient treasure. By helping to discover the rich Sanskrit and Persian literature, the Society placed them at par with Greek and Latin literature. The Society also helped to make Sanskrit almost a world language within a span of about half a century. The scholars of Asiatic Society not only brought to light the richness of Sanskrit literature, but also underlined the fact that there existed a bond between Europe and Asia in the ancient past. This was perhaps what inspired many European scholars to delve into India's past to clearly conceptualize the linkage. It was such deep understanding and recognition of the richness of our civilization and the linkages between the two continents that led the renowned Historian Arnold Toynbee to conclude, in later years:

> It is already becoming clear that a Chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race.... Here (in India) we have an attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family — and, in the atomic age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

More than the impact the Society had on Europe, it had also influenced the evolution of Indian thought and life. By unearthing the hidden intellectual treasure of India, the Society helped in discovering India's past and in articulating the evolution of historical consciousness of its people. It would not be wrong to say that the Society played a role in fostering a sense of nationalism and patriotism among Indians. The Society also made Indians more aware of their past and proud of their ancient intellectual roots, without

letting that awareness to be taken to the levels of chauvinism or degenerating into narrow notions of cultural nationalism.

The Asiatic Society has helped substantially in preserving and protecting India's rich and varied heritage in multifarious ways. Indology, as a field of study, assumed new dimensions with the help of the Society. In the process, India's achievements and accomplishments got wider coverage across the continents and the oceans, and helped in generating heightened interest in our languages and literature, history and sociology, culture and architecture, etc. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore once remarked, 'the great ages of renaissance of history were those when men suddenly discovered the seeds of thought in the granary of the past'. The Asiatic Society can definitely take credit in being a part of the Indian renaissance.

When the Asiatic Society was established on 15 January 1784, Sir William Jones dreamed of a Centre for Asian Studies, including almost everything concerning man and nature within the geographical limits of the continent. As the Society itself has recorded, 'most of the mysteries of this vast land, like its old inscriptions in Brahmi, were still undeciphered, and Comparative Philology as a discipline or science was not yet born'. During its long and eventful history, the Society has carved out a niche for itself as a Center of Excellence in Indology and related fields. It has contributed significantly in increasing the awareness of our people of their past and in making them feel proud of their intellectual roots. The Founding Fathers of the Society unearthed the hidden ancient Indian treasure presumably because they had an open mind, not at all plagued by the prejudices and bias, rooted in the hierarchical civilization perspective.

It is true that in recognition of the significant contribution and the work of research that has been and is being done by the Society, the Government of India in 1984 recognised the Society as an institution of national importance. However, the contribution of the Society to the Indian renaissance in the 19th century is yet to be fully evaluated. Though it has a vast library and invaluable collection of manuscripts, lithographic works, paintings both European and Indian, its great collection of journals, artifacts, coins and inscriptions require proper space apart from the need for increased research activities and I am sure appropriate authorities will come forward to solve the problem of space. Fruitful completion of work in the large number of subjects identified for research by the Society now will be invaluable additions to the world of learning.

Since 1984 attempts have been and are being made by the Society for transforming itself into a nodal centre of higher research in Indology, Linguistics, History, Sociology, Medicine, and Scientific subjects. I understand

that thirty seven research scholars, whose talents have been recognized by the academic world, are now engaged in fruitful research under the guidance of highly competent supervisors in twenty five disciplines. The famous journal of the Society, and the research dissertations of a high quality, regularly published by it are rich sources for researchers.

However, what is expected is that the Government of India through the Ministry of Culture should provide much greater attention to enable the Society to enlarge its activities keeping in mind the basic autonomous character of the Society. In my view, it is the duty of the Government of India to render all help for the development of this Society, the oldest institution of its kind, as a nodal centre of Oriental Studies.

I heartily congratulate all of you on this auspicious occasion of your Foundation Day for your commitment to continue the good work in the same spirit which motivated its establishment more than two centuries ago.

Thank you.

UNDERSTANDING HISTORY IN THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE*

I deem it a great honour to have the opportunity to associate myself with the 66th Session of the Indian History Congress being held here at Santiniketan, the fountainhead of great ideas and creativity, immortalised by the life and work of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. All through its seven decades of existence, great historians of Bengal, like Susobhan Sarkar, Niharranjan Ray, Radha Kumud Mookerji, Surendra Nath Sen, and R.C. Majumdar, and, of course, Prof. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, among others, side by side with their peers from different regions of India, like R.S. Sharma, Sarvepalli Gopal, Mohammad Habib, Tarachand, Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan, Irfan Habib, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra — to mention only a few — have provided dynamic leadership to the History Congress. They all rose above provincialism and narrow sectarianism, and strongly resisted non-scientific intrusions into the contours of historical research, and, in the process, contributed significantly to the enhancement of the quality of intellectual life in our country. It is befitting that the History Congress has met today in the University founded by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore who not only developed the idea of the Indian civilization as a composite culture.

Gurudev was not only a great visionary but also a philosopher of history. He was profoundly original in his writing and his poems are testimony to his versatility and brilliance. Gurudev wanted to see India independent while at the same time, he wanted India not to close its doors to learn from the history, accomplishments and experiences of other countries. The great humanist that he was, Gurudev wrote and worked for freeing the human mind from the bondage of stifling traditionalism. He believed in critical scrutiny and was averse to anything that failed to stand the test of reason and logic. Perhaps the greatness of Gurudev as a philosopher of history lies in the fact that he provided one of the finest examples of being concerned with the past, while remaining extremely sensitive to the present.

What is noticeable is that his secular outlook and approach characterize all his historical writings. His secular approach does not, of course, mean rejection of religion *per se* but at the same time he is truly secular because of

* At the 66th Session of the Indian History Congress, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, Kolkata (28 January 2006).

his innate conviction in the unlimited and positive creative powers in man. He has been a great advocate against all fetters; he opposed any boundary that limited or confined man. He understood and appreciated the contributions of great civilizations of his past and of his times.

The lofty and luminous legacy of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore can be felt by any one who visits Santiniketan. In his own words, Visva-Bharati was 'the cargo of my life'. Gurudev put a great deal of emphasis on self-motivation and not on imposed discipline and tried to foster intellectual curiosity in the minds of the students. Later, in 1921, Visva-Bharati came into existence as a University and soon emerged as a premier academic institution of our country. No wonder, one can see in the list of alumni of Visva Bharati, names of many outstanding women and men, who have strengthened our national fabric in various ways. Incidentally, a portrait of the Gurudev adorns the Central Hall of Parliament House, among those of the other great sons and daughters of India, as a mark of the nation's gratitude for his many-splendoured contributions. Only recently, Gurudev's statue was unveiled in the new Parliament Library Complex as a tribute to the great creative genius.

If I may say so, it is quite appropriate that the historians assembled here will discuss and debate *Tagore's Vision and the 21st Century* during this Congress. History, as I understand, is basically the study of what happened in the past and the study proceeds and progresses through interpretation of data and facts available to the historians. It is essential that we try to understand the past in its proper context and perspective, as part of a web of interrelated institutions, values and beliefs that define a particular culture or era. The historians' duty, I believe, is not only to explain historical events in terms of how and why change takes place within societies and cultures, but also to objectively and logically account for the continuation of tradition, understand the link between continuity and change, and explain the origin, evolution and decline of ideas, cultures and institutions. It is in this endeavour that historians have to guard against the tendency and temptation to confuse faith with history and mythology with science.

The question that needs to be addressed with regard to the discipline of history is; what indeed is the purpose of investigating the events of the past? Is history all about invasions, wars, famines and the so-called clash of civilizations and about the lives and times of Kings and Queens ? What is the place of ordinary people in historical research? Is there an end to history?

If we accept the proposition that in order to uplift the masses, change is necessary and conscious efforts have to be made to bring about appropriate and positive changes, then knowledge of the past is an essential prerequisite for those who set out to accomplish the task. As is rightly observed, you can

ignore your past only at the risk of your own peril and if you do not learn the right lessons from history, the greatest risk is that you will end up repeating the mistakes of history.

The task of the historian is difficult because he has to exercise his intellectual acumen to diagnose from among the roots of the past, traits which are healthy and those which are harmful. This means a historian who is concerned with the past has to be, like Gurudev Tagore, equally, if not more, concerned with and sensitive to the present. As has been observed 'History is our analysis of the past in order that we may understand the present and guide our conduct in future'.

The colonial approach to Indian history was prejudiced and blinkered and was centred around degradation and vilification of Indian civilization and culture and questioned India's ability to govern itself. Historians with a colonial mindset, like their apologists in our contemporary times, not only projected Hindus and Muslims as permanent adversaries, but also questioned the basis on which India as a nation-state existed. This one-sided and negative view of history could be pushed aside with the national movement for freedom gaining momentum in our country. Soon, there emerged a nationalist view of Indian history which forcefully countered this derogatory and misleading colonial approach to Indian history. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad were in the forefront of the nationalist view, forcefully emphasising the pluralistic and secular nature of Indian civilization, rooted in the notion of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, that recognised the need for and provided space to every section of the society to live, work and prosper. Today, when the sanctity of the discipline is being threatened by a divisive interpretation of history based on religion, which explicitly renounces the ideal of plural and syncretic culture and a secular vision of national unity, it is vitally important to recall that heritage, the unifying vision of history, provided by those great minds of India. It is, therefore, essential for the historians to be always on the guard against the use of political power to settle debated questions of history.

The importance of objectivity in historical research can never be overlooked. Understanding history warrants strict adherence to accepted methods of enquiry, rigorously studying evidence, using sophisticated tools of research, in which method and application of the established theories have a lot of significance. A historian has to bring to the fore the rational and logical facet of events and individuals. All the past practices need to be tested according to the standards set by the modern society and must justify their relevance to continue to be in existence. It is here that historians have a vital role to play. Historians who are justifiably concerned about the developments in the past, have to be equally sensitive to the events taking place in and

around them in the present. No matter, whatever be the content and contour of the Hindu-Muslims ties during the medieval period or during the colonial period, we cannot see that relationship now in terms of a confrontationist role. All religions have flourished in India and they continue to do so. The adoption of one of Tagore's poems by Bangladesh as its national anthem must be baffling to many of those who visualise Hindu-Muslim relations as inherently antagonistic. Many people tend to forget that it is poverty, and not religion, that causes discontentment and antagonism in a diverse society. We must keep these aspects in mind while writing history for posterity or teaching history to our students.

People–their life, interests and the impact they made on their times should occupy the central place in historical enquiry and their interests and concerns should become the focus of political discourse. It is encouraging to note that, in the context of our democratic society, where everybody, irrespective of his or her caste, religion or gender, is guaranteed certain fundamental rights, more and more historians are beginning to look into those components of society which were earlier beyond their study. Attempt to learn the histories of the underprivileged and the ethnic and the religious minorities as also women, children, workers, farmers, etc.–those sections of our society which were otherwise said to be without any history–deserve to be complimented. We need more and more 'integral historians' to borrow an expression from Gramsci, to understand the social processes in their entirety. This reorienting of history around the masses is what is necessary to achieve, what Tagore called 'the triumph of the insulted man'.

Democratic institutions in India have taken deep roots and what is now required is to refine these institutions in the light of our experience in the last nearly six decades. In our scheme of things, the Parliament occupies a pivotal position as the supreme legislative institution of the country. Over the last five decades and more, drawing on the wisdom of the Constitution, our Parliament has sought to be a beacon for the governance of the country. In spite of various imperfections, our elected representatives in the national Legislature have consistently striven to fine-tune our governance structure. I agree that we need to do a lot more to achieve the ideals that we have enshrined in the Preamble to our Constitution.

Our Parliament embodies the spirit of our history and symbolises the aspirations of our people. That being so, the history of our Parliament will be an important chapter in modern Indian history. I will only request our historians to properly record the history of Parliament — so that the succeeding generations get the correct picture of what Parliament has done or achieved as the highest legislative body in the country.

Cautioning us of the dangers of mythology taking over knowledge, celebrated historian, Eric Hobsbawm observed: 'The curious fact is that as we move into the 21st century, historians have become central to politics. We historians are the monopoly suppliers of the past. The only way to modify the past that does not sooner or later go through historians is by destroying the past'. To this I would add, distorting the past also. It is against this danger that professional historians have to be ever vigilant. History is too serious a subject for a nation, to be allowed to be manipulated to suit the political purposes of any group of persons. History Congress has always resisted threats to historical scholarship and national unity and warned against the use of political power to debase history to suit the hidden agenda of any political formation.

It is, therefore, essential that we understand history in the right perspective so that we, as nations and peoples, can benefit from the experience of the past by learning the right lessons from it which will help us in moving forward as world citizens of the 21st century. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore prophetically wrote: 'There is only one history–the history of man. All national histories are chapters in the larger one.' The human being is the truth in the centrality of all historical writings. Historians can never overlook this cardinal principle while writing for posterity.

I understand that eminent historians will be presenting several papers dealing with various sections of Indian History like the ancient, medieval and the modern period. I am sure the discussions will be meaningful and will further enrich History as an important academic discipline.

With these words, I thank the organisers for giving me an opportunity to share my views with this distinguished body of historians and I wish the Conference here a glorious success.

Thank you.

INDIAN BANKING IN A GLOBALIZED ECONOMY: ROLE OF STATE BANK OF INDIA*

I have great pleasure to join all of you at the Bi-centennial Celebrations of the State Bank of India. It is very appropriate that the celebrations start from our great city, as it was here, where the Bank of Calcutta, the earlier incarnation of your Bank started its journey.

The State Bank of India, as any Indian is proud to admit, is the largest and the oldest public sector bank in our country. The story of its evolution from the Bank of Calcutta to the Bank of Bengal, later as the Presidency Bank and then as the Imperial Bank of India, and finally as the State Bank of India, is quite fascinating. All through these years, it has played its multifarious roles as a commercial bank, a banker's bank and as a banker to the Government quite effectively. No wonder that it emerged as the premier financial institution of the country in the pre-Independence days itself, by virtue of its excellent banking traditions and high standards of integrity in its operations.

It was only because of its efficiency in business, profitability, internal discipline and, above all, its credibility that the SBI was picked up by the Government of India as its banking arm in 1955 to meet the emergent needs of the country's economic regeneration after Independence. Set up, also with a sense of social purpose, the State Bank of India has been playing a pivotal role in shaping the country's economic destiny ever since.

Recognised as the largest public sector bank in terms of both network and operations, the State Bank has been acting as a catalyst in our planning efforts to bring about a rapid, purposive and positive change in the overall development of the country in banking, agriculture, industry, trade and a host of other activities in the economy. The bank, which accounts for a major part of the country's total bank deposits, is always called upon to play a developmental role and to assist the Government in the effective implementation of various Government-sponsored socio-economic programmes.

* At the Bi-centennial Celebrations of the State Bank of India, Kolkata (8 February 2006).

Over the past decades, the landscape of the banking system in India has undergone a fundamental change. Since the nationalisation of the major commercial banks in the country almost four decades ago, Indian banking has made remarkable progress in terms of geographical expansion, growth in business and functional diversification in complex and challenging areas – all directed towards converting the banking system into an effective instrument of socio-economic transformation in consonance with various national objectives and developmental priorities. As a result, India has been able to build up a strong financial infrastructure. Today, our financial system has become more sophisticated in response to the varying needs of our economy and the State Bank of India has consolidated its dominant position in the country's financial system. More significant is its penetration into rural and semi-urban areas, thereby leading to structural transformation of sectoral distribution of bank credit in favour of small farmers, small enterprises and self-employed people.

The long period of about more than five decades of economic planning in India has witnessed several policy changes under different Governments. Seen in the overall perspective, there has been an added emphasis on the development of the weaker sections of society, rural economic development, development of small-scale industrial sector and building up of foreign exchange surplus by promoting export-oriented industrial activities. The State Bank of India has, all along, been contributing commendably to the promotion of all these activities. With the non-profitable nature of subsistence agriculture, and frequent occurrences of droughts and famines, it was often said that the Indian farmer was born in debt, lived in debt and died in debt. That is why, since Independence, continuous efforts have been made for the institutionalisation of rural credit and the pioneering role played by the SBI in spreading rural credit throughout the length and breadth of the country has indeed been quite praiseworthy.

Though the nationalisation of major commercial banks has undoubtedly led to the extension of banking services in rural areas, the benefits have not fully reached the needy and the deprived. It is a matter of concern that despite making significant improvements in areas such as financial viability, profitability and competitiveness, banks have not so far been able to include the underprivileged sections of society into the fold of basic banking services to the extent that is required.

Because of their inability to save and to repay the loans, our poor population in rural areas finds it difficult to have access to various financial services provided by the banks. In recent years, efforts have been made to ensure a better credit delivery system for the poor through poor-friendly micro-credit approach under which small amounts of credit are offered to

lower income groups comprising small and marginal farmers, landless labourers, petty shop owners, hawkers, fishermen, rural artisans, etc. But what has actually been achieved in terms of coverage of the poor is unfortunately not very substantial. There is still a long way to go to secure the objective of bringing the poor under the fold of formal banking. If a perceptive and socially sensitive approach is developed, the capacity of the poor to save and their credit-worthiness can be significantly enhanced. Banks need to pay special attention to facilitating micro-credit to women and the educated unemployed and other weaker sections of society. There is a feeling that the deterioration in customer service which is generally characterised by delay, negligence, errors, indifference and scant attention paid to the genuine needs of the customers, is the heaviest casualty in banking, especially in the backward and rural areas. Many of the new rural branches are often manned by staff without adequate training and orientation. I would like to stress that all rural development programmes require a lot more commitment, attitudinal adjustment and a crusading spirit on the part of the banking industry. The management of every bank has a bounden duty to suitably diversify their banking operations in favour of the rural masses so as to ensure that they do not suffer any sort of financial exclusion in the furtherance of their socio-economic well-being.

The establishment of new private banks and foreign banks is rapidly changing the competitive landscape of our banking industry, thereby placing greater demands on banks to gear themselves up to meet the increasing needs of the customers. The enhanced level of deregulation has added to the numerous demands on banks. Such a demanding and competitive environment has greatly exposed every bank to a host of new challenges. With the ever-increasing pace and extent of globalisation of the economy and the opening up of the Indian banking system to global competition, our banks need to equip themselves to operate in an increasingly competitive environment. They must, therefore, further improve their own systems and procedures to international standards and, at the same time, strengthen their financial base by diversifying their activities.

The banking system in India has entered a phase that marks growth with quality innovation and diversification. Our banking system should have resilience to meet the emerging challenges effectively in the coming years. As banking has become more and more complex and sophisticated and its involvement in new sectors has grown, almost every bank has been facing problems in certain areas such as deposit mobilisation, profitability, mounting overdues, customer service and human resource development. The banking industry, as a whole, therefore, needs to formulate innovative financial instruments to accelerate deposit mobilisation from unexplored areas. Factors like cost control, improving the quality of loan assets and timely recovery

need to be given more emphasis to arrest the erosion in profitability. To overcome the problem of mounting overdues, banks must develop a machinery for proper identification of borrowers and their monitoring, scientific appraisal of loan applications and close follow-up of the deployed funds. Yet, our banks cannot afford to overlook the legitimate concerns of the poor borrowers. All in all, there is a greater need for internal efficiency, better house-keeping, systems and procedures, work technology, information system and better motivation to cater to the needs of the customers in extending various services promptly and efficiently.

Every public sector bank in India today is confronted with the serious problem of accumulating non-performing assets. Resolving the problem of ever-increasing non-performing assets is absolutely essential for the strength and stability of the banking system. I am happy to note that this aspect has received great attention in the recent years and several measures have been taken to tackle this problem. Debt Recovery Tribunals, Lok Adalats and the Securitisation Act are some of the major initiatives taken by the Government, all of which are of recent origin. It is, therefore, too early to judge the efficacy of these initiatives. What one can expect from the banks is that while effectively making use of the new legislative and other measures, they should lay greater emphasis on preventive measures to address the problem of accumulating non-performing assets.

In the present-day environment, all banks operate in a 'buyer's market' and therein comes the utmost importance of catering efficiently and proactively to the customer needs. Customer orientation of banks is, therefore, the need of the hour in the face of stiff competition from private and foreign banks and financial institutions. The future of every bank lies in identifying new customers and developing new ways for meeting their needs to their satisfaction. For this purpose, imaginative and innovative changes are essential and there is a need for application of a planned marketing approach to find proper outlets for banking services. As such, banks need to study carefully the various segments of population and formulate new schemes to suit their specific requirements. Scientific marketing and customer research will also be a key to future success. Banks must study the motives, habits, feelings and preferences of their customers, if they are to become truly market-oriented. To attain the required degree of efficiency and effectiveness in banking operations, every bank employee must have a clear knowledge of the various schemes of his bank. He should be able to understand the customer requirements and suggest schemes to meet their needs.

The Indian financial system, of which banking is a very significant component, has considerably widened and deepened in the recent years. The banks in India today have come to play a much larger role in the mobilisation

of resources than in the past. Given the significant role of the banks in the fast growing business world, one cannot afford to underplay the importance of a strong and resilient banking system.

Friends, I am happy to note that the State Bank of India's performance has been quite impressive and it has achieved spectacular growth during the past decades. The SBI, today, is a household name across the country and has made remarkable strides in respect of priority sector advances, thereby contributing significantly towards the growth of our economy. I understand that almost all the branches of the Bank are now fully computerized to improve the customer services. The ATM Network of the Bank spread across the length and breadth of the country is, in fact, a national network with an unparalleled reach. The Bank's Information Technology Programme aimed at achieving efficiency in operations, meeting customer and market expectations and facing competition has greatly helped to streamline its functioning. Its international banking, spread over 29 countries around the world, has also been a major focus. With sound business strategy and responsible management, the SBI, I am sure, will be able to successfully meet the challenges ahead, achieve sustained growth and serve the ever-increasing banking requirements of the country. I also hope that the management is making every effort for the welfare of its officers and staff in every possible manner. I commend the management and all officers and staff for the excellent work they are doing and felicitate all of you on the Bi-centennial Celebrations. We wholeheartedly agree with your slogan, 'The Nation banks on us'.

With these words, I wish the State Bank of India all the very best in its commendable endeavours in the socio-economic progress of the country. I am confident that the Bank will continue to grow in strength and stature in the decades ahead.

Thank you.

PUSHING THE FRONTIERS OF THE SCIENCE OF CHEMISTRY*

I am thankful to the Indian Chemical Society for giving me an opportunity to take part in the 42nd Annual Convention of Chemists.

I wish to congratulate the Society for selecting Santiniketan, the seat of Visva Bharati as the venue for their Convention. This great institution, bequeathed to us by the Kaviguru Rabindra Nath Tagore, is a shining symbol of learning, an ode to the spirit of enquiry and to the pursuit of unfettered intellect. I have no doubt that the Santiniketan provides the perfect setting and the most conducive environs for your deliberations in this Convention.

It was in 1919 that three Indian Chemists of repute, namely Jnanchandra Ghosh, Jnanendra Nath Mukherjee and Shantiswaroop Bhatnagar thought of founding the Indian Chemical Society. Their dream took shape five years later and the Indian Chemical Society was born in May 1924, with Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray as its first President and Dr. J.N. Mukherjee as the founder Honorary Secretary.

If one reads the preamble of the Indian Chemical Society's Constitution, one is bound to be impressed with its nationalistic tenor, particularly in its emphasis on the acceleration of agricultural and industrial growth and its role in fostering public welfare and education.

It is a matter of gratification that over the years, the Society has provided a valuable platform to Chemists to interact with one another and to publish their research papers, and in doing so, it has served constantly to widen the horizons of Chemistry in India. It is a testament to the useful role the Society has been playing that its membership has grown from 101 Fellows in 1924 to more than 2000 Fellows today, encompassing the most eminent Chemists of our country. The Society's pre-eminence is not confined to Indian shores. Several Nobel Laureates in Chemistry such as Prof. Irene Juliet Curie of France, Prof. A. Summerfield of Germany, Prof. L Ruzicka of Switzerland, Prof. Linus Pauling of USA, Prof. D.H.R. Barton of France and Prof. R.B. Woodward, among others, have accepted the honorary Fellowship of the Indian Chemical Society.

* At the 42nd Annual Convention of Chemists, organized by the Indian Chemical Society, Santiniketan (10 February 2006).

I understand that the Indian Chemical Society runs branches in several cities and helps organize regional symposia and seminars for Indian Chemists, where budding Chemists get an opportunity to present their research findings. With the tremendous advances being made in the field of Chemistry and with the path-breaking achievements in bio-technology and material sciences, I have no doubt that the Indian Chemical Society will assume an even greater role in steering chemical researchers in the country and so contribute to their development that they can be at par with the best in the world.

It is indicative of our times that today, the science of Chemistry is becoming more and more inter-disciplinary and is collaborating with other branches of science, to push the boundaries of human knowledge and invention, and to give to mankind materials and processes unheard of before. These are, indeed, very exciting times for young Chemists as newer and newer sub-disciplines of Chemistry are opening up. New discoveries and breakthroughs are being reported from Chemistry laboratories all across the world that promise to bring to life materials that will transform the way humans live.

Chemists around the globe are pushing the frontiers of the science of chemistry to produce the drugs and medicines to combat human diseases. Research is on to make medicines for malaria, cancer and AIDS, which would make drugs available at 1/10th of their present cost.

Already, bacteria have been successfully used to devour oil spills in the oceans. The branch of Environmental Chemistry is working towards making our environment less contaminated while the discipline of Green Chemistry is looking at making products and designing processes that reduce or eliminate the use of hazardous substances in agriculture and other fields.

Stimulating research is going on in chemical laboratories around the globe. Understandably, this requires huge investments in 'Research and Development' activities in our scientific institutions. While the Government has been doing its bit in providing funds for research in Pure and Applied Sciences, we need to look at innovative financing options so that more funds could be garnered for funding R&D activities in our country.

The private sector, particularly the pharmaceutical companies have been providing significant funds for 'Research and Development' in their laboratories, which has helped the Indian pharmaceutical industry gain a firm foothold across the world, in developing and marketing low-cost drugs of world standards. However, the quantum of funds available to Indian chemists needs to grow manifold so that they can be at the forefront of pioneering breakthroughs in this field.

We will also need to look at the whole issue of Intellectual Property Rights in India so that diligent researchers discovering new processes and materials can be assured of returns through protection of their copyrights. The Indian Chemical Society can play an important role in generating public opinion in this regard and in highlighting to the Government the urgent need for a quantum upgradation in infrastructure for laboratory research, as also for a public-private collaboration in this sphere.

India is a huge country and, gradually, coming into its own as a 'Knowledge Nation'. While our scientists need to pursue high-end scientific ventures such as space exploration, deep sea exploration and super-computing technologies, we must be aware that our one-billion plus population looks to its scientific community for conversion of scientific research into tangible products and services that could impact positively on their living standards. Therefore, whether it is the designing of new hybrid seeds through bio-technology for agricultural crops or designing new medicines and drugs at cheaper costs, we would do well to remember the social context in which we operate.

In India today, there are a hundred ways in which Chemistry is improving the quality of our lives. Polymers are being used for targeted delivery in cancer patients at the malignant sites, to save the patient from the harmful radiation effects of chemotherapy. The coating of coronary artery stents with a polymer has revolutionized treatment for blockages in the arteries, resulting in major reduction in the number of coronary by-pass surgeries. Artificial limbs made of polymers are providing new rays of hope to the physically challenged. Diseases such as Tuberculosis, which crippled a large number of Indians, as a terminal disease until a few decades ago, has been rendered fully curable thanks to the availability of low-cost drugs. From a food-deficit country in the 1950s, we are a food exporting country, again thanks to the hybrid strains of seeds produced in our laboratories.

I am sure that the Indian Chemical Society will continue to underscore this social context to the research being undertaken by enterprising chemists across the country. While Pure Science must be pursued, efforts to transfer technology from the laboratory for the benefit of the common man must also not be lost sight of.

I wish the Indian Chemical Society success in its endeavours and wish the Convention all success. I am sure your deliberations during the Conference will be enriching and will help the development of the country in a significant manner and that Gurudev's message, for pursuit of excellence, with ever widening mental horizons, enthused with a spirit of enquiry and research, will permeate your discussions.

Thank you.

IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

It is indeed an honour and a special privilege to be invited to deliver the Convocation Address here today. I am grateful to the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, the Faculty and the Administration for giving me this opportunity to be here and to address the members of one of the young and vibrant Universities of our country today.

Over its nearly two decades of existence, the Tripura University has already made significant contributions to shape the young minds of this region, particularly those belonging to Tripura, which is the second smallest State of India. I am particularly happy that it has moved on to its own campus here at Suryamaninagar, which, I am sure, will provide a fillip to its academic mission in the years ahead. It is also satisfying to note that the University, despite several odds, has not only maintained its autonomous character but has also kept pace with the ever increasing expectations which is proven by the fact that as compared to 7 Post Graduate Departments and 14 Programmes of study in 1986-87, there are now as many as 16 such Departments and 38 Programmes currently being run by the University.

Today, this University is the hub of the intellectual and scholarly pursuits of the industrious and highly talented people of this region. It is always a challenge for an academic institution serving a geographically distant part of the country to keep pace with the fast emerging educational and occupational trends around the world. It is, indeed, praiseworthy that the young University, in the process of successfully realizing the various expectations placed on it at the time of its foundation in 1987, has earned a distinctive place as among the well-known Universities of the country today. The distinguished Vice-Chancellor and his dedicated team of teachers, staff and students can legitimately be proud of their accomplishments, through their committed and diligent efforts. I hope, its constant efforts to achieve academic excellence, which is now well recognized, will persuade the concerned authorities to grant it the status of a Central University.

Before I proceed further, I would like to offer my hearty congratulations to all those who have successfully completed their programmes of study and

* At the Convocation of the Tripura University, Suryamaninagar, Agartala (8 April 2006).

are going to receive their honours and degrees today. I extend my best wishes to all of them with the firm belief that having received a high level of education in this University, they will now make positive impact on the world around them in different ways.

It hardly needs to be stated that education is the most effective instrument to make citizens socially sensitive, responsible and forward looking. In a plural society like ours, it is through broad secular education that we can hope to foster values to promote national integration and harmony among all citizens. Swami Vivekananda said that it was only through education that 'character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet... '.

One of the major tasks before our Founding Fathers, in the wake of freedom, was to introduce a comprehensive education system at different levels that could address the developmental challenges of a country then steeped in poverty, ignorance and superstition. It was recognized that only through good education can we produce people who will be proud of their heritage and will strive to take the country forward, after having gone through centuries of subjugation and humiliation, and will also provide the necessary momentum to economic progress, to ensure better quality of life to our people, to help bring about an acceptable level of social and economic equity in the country and to promote the task of our national unity. In the years since Independence, in spite of the various adverse circumstances, the country has built up a very large system of education and has produced a vast body of progressively disposed men and women equipped with a high order of scientific and technological capabilities and committed to broader national values.

Our educational system, however, has not been able to offer a level-playing field to the cross-section of our people. There is a wide gap between the opportunities available to the rich, educated and urban-centred people and the poor illiterate or semi-literate, rural and other disadvantageously placed. Despite the efforts of several decades, disparity in education has been a continuing and despairing feature of this country. Not only there is an unacceptably large proportion of our population still illiterate, there is major unfulfilled demand for quality public education, at every level of learning and research.

For a country like India, where nearly 30 per cent of the population are yet to receive even the basic literacy, the current levels of public spending on education at little above 3 per cent of the GDP, against the international average of 5 per cent, is too low and needs to be augmented. Studies have shown that there is a clear and significant connection between investments in human capital, labour productivity and a country's subsequent growth.

Such investments result in better and more efficient economic activities and faster and more broad-based growth, positively impacting upon the quality of living of the people and the overall economic standing of the country. 'Education', as Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen said, is essentially about 'capacity building and it widens the choice of people and empowers the nations'.

We still have the unfortunate distinction of being host to the largest number of illiterates in the world. This gigantic problem can be effectively addressed only if we start from the primary levels of learning itself. There are still a large number of villages and urban settlements without government schools in the approachable vicinity. It is estimated that only 56 per cent of children in the age group of 5-9 years are attending school today. Around 18 per cent of rural primary schools still do not have any *pukka* building, and another 20 per cent function out of only one room, which would clearly affect both the quality and effectiveness of teaching in such schools.

Investment in education is essential for democratic consolidation, for social cohesiveness and for sustained growth. We have to take our whole society along on the path of education and development and should not allow any section to lag behind. Of special importance is the women's education as they constitute nearly fifty per cent of our population. There is an unacceptably wide disparity between the literacy levels of men and women in our country. Removing the factors that inhibit the full participation of women in the various spheres of society is, therefore, the very first step for the empowerment of women in our society. Lack of equal opportunity for education is important among them. Swami Vivekananda has very rightly said: 'If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiment of the divine mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise.' To overcome this gap, we have to employ the full range of educational opportunities and relate them with the available Government and private initiatives to the benefit of every segment of our population.

Another challenge that we face is to bridge the urban-rural divide in educational investment and opportunities. If we have to realize our economic potentials, the concerns of our rural population are to be given adequate attention in our planning processes. Our stress should be on building capacities among them to help them seize economic opportunities, improve livelihood and enhance the quality of life they enjoy. Rural India has a vast reservoir of human energy, intelligence and aspirations. Its enormous potential has to be converted into national wealth, by evolving education as an integrated package of traditional know-how, academic knowledge and practical skills, which could support the people to earn livelihood both in rural economy and outside it.

The world is moving into what is characterized as the information age. The various market forces are restructuring the economic content of our lives. The impact, that has pervaded almost all walks of our life, is largely discernible in the modes of production, dissemination of knowledge, use of information networks and mass media, which are redefining the prospects of employment and employability of a person. It has tremendous bearing on education. The skills and specialization of the products of our higher education should match the changing needs of our country today. As an analyst observed, 'our children will not be effective in tomorrow's world if they are trained in yesterday's skills.' In such a fast changing scenario, it is important that suitable efforts are made to arm young people with the power which knowledge gives. Unlike in the past, it is the force of knowledge that defines the way we invest, produce and deal with other players in the international market. Along with large capital investment, now we require highly skilled human capital of knowledge workers to play a decisive role in strengthening our vibrant economy.

As the productive processes and the nature of occupations have been constantly changing with the fast pace of developments in science and technology and the world moving in the direction of knowledge and skill-driven activities, the curricula also has to change at a matching pace in the country. We need to recognize that today the State is no longer the principal employer of the educated youth in the country. The majority of employment opportunities are now coming from various other sectors. It is, therefore, essential for our institutions of higher learning to reorient themselves to meet the new demands and needs of the fast-changing knowledge-driven world.

Our education system should be able to absorb and accommodate the changes and provide the right kind of manpower for the new productive processes. Many of our best technical and science graduates on whom heavy investment is being made by the country, and trained to meet the demands of a growing economy, are not contributing their skills towards our economic development. It is estimated that almost half of them leave the country immediately upon graduation to pursue advanced study or employment abroad. Unless we succeed in retaining these invaluable products, the best and the brightest of our own Universities and technical institutions, for our own development, we will not be able to effectively compete with the rest of the world in our developmental strategy.

We have to transform our huge human resources into an asset. For this we have to evolve an effective strategy to raise the knowledge skills of our people across the board. The most important prerequisite here is an emphasis on quality education. Our country is well known for the quality of mind and is recognized as a potential knowledge hub of the world. Our basic

mathematical abilities, our proficiency in the English language, our tested competence in the IT sector, amongst others, if properly exploited, can give a great momentum to our economic development.

An important area, requiring our attention, to my mind, is that of the quality of research in our institutions of higher learning. A significant fall in academic standards at all levels is being experienced in the country today. In terms of University education and research, India is far behind the best in the world. It is observed that not even 3 per cent of research done in the country is recognized abroad. Scientific progress in the country and social progress as such can be achieved only through quality research.

Those engaged in research will have to excel in their area of work, and those who guide research should demonstrate a better sense of accountability. Academics should not be seen as just another profession. It is a profession with enormous social responsibilities. As the Chinese saying goes, 'the schools and universities are a country's future in miniature'. Our Founding Fathers, while establishing Institutions of higher learning for Independent India, had visualized that they all would, over the years, transform themselves into centres of excellence.

India today needs world-class research-based Universities that can support modern research and to compete successfully in the knowledge-driven world of the 21st century. Large-scale development requires a sophisticated and knowledge-based economy. It is for the University system to help sustain that path.

It is also important to bear in mind that the primary social agenda of education is the development of our human resources in the right direction. It is not to be used as a medium to further anyone's narrow political or partisan agenda. Mythological beliefs and matters of faith should not be allowed to interfere with scientific enquiry which is the basis of and the rationale for modern learning. Education is essentially about rational enquiry and for a highly pluralistic society like ours, it has to be developed as a harmonizing force rather than as an instrument to promote divisiveness and disunity among the people. A progressive and forward looking education will greatly address our major social evils and will help in strengthening the secular and liberal fabric of our country, remaining sensitive to the specific cultural identities, plural nature of our society, the democratic ethos of our people and to the need for positive dialogue between cultures. As Jawaharlal Nehru rightly described:

> A University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for onward march of the human race towards higher objectives.

> If the Universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people. But if the temple of learning itself becomes a home of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation progress or a person grow in stature?

Friends, today we are passing through a critical stage in our nation's life. Confrontation, divisiveness and intolerance characterize our political and social life today. Our people, particularly our youth, are becoming increasingly cynical about the way our institutions of democracy are functioning. They are beginning to question the efficacy of democracy in addressing their concerns. Questions are being raised in the people's mind about the content and quality of our democracy and about the declining values in our national life today. Our common people are becoming wary about the emergence of divisive agenda in our national politics, about corruption eating into the vitals of our nation, about the growing culture of violence and intolerance in our society, about the intrusion of undesirable elements into the political arena and into our institutions of democracy, about the absence of consensus on important national issues and about development not taking the centrestage of political discourse in the country.

To the educated youth, I would like to remind that the society has large expectations on them. An educated citizenry is the greatest asset of a democracy. They have to provide leadership to our society at large and become instruments of change. They should volunteer to join the task of nation-building and in holding the institutions of democracy accountable to the society. We will be able to reap the benefits of democracy only through the effective participation of all our citizens in the political processes. Those who are morally, socially and financially corrupt should have no place in our national life. We should ensure that our conduct in public life, be it in our democratic institutions or in the academic institutions, should be beyond reproach.

Radical changes in the socio-political scenario can be brought about if our youth, driven by idealism and committed to the larger national causes and avoiding the issues that divide us, actively come into the arena of mainstream socio-political life. A democratic society can be sustained only when responsible citizens, capable and committed to make a difference to our national life, come forward and shoulder the responsibilities of correcting the aberrations in the system. It is our collective and common responsibility to evolve ways and means to perfect our system of governance, rather than only finding fault with it and running away from their responsibilities towards it.

We all need to bear in mind that our Parliament is not only the highest people's institution but the best forum in a democracy through which

socio-economic and political transformation can be brought about in our country. Therefore, what is required is more and more committed, well-meaning people, positively and progressively disposed towards people's problems coming to occupy the political space in the country. This process has to start with our youth who are our future. They should realize that if they do not volunteer to discharge their responsibilities towards democracy actively, they will be only passive witnesses to the process of the gradual undermining of the best system of governance thoughtfully bequeathed to the nation by our Founding Fathers. Parliament, rather than to be looked down upon, should be relied on as offering the best avenue for public service and for contributing to the process of taking our great country to its destined role in the world.

Our people, particularly the youth should realize that the destiny of a nation is built upon the character of its citizens in the shaping of which education plays an important role. To my young friends, I would like to say that whether it is in public life or in student life, we cannot reach great heights if we lack in character and discipline. The graduates who are passing out of this University should consider themselves, to be among the privileged few amongst the people of India. They are among the little over 6 per cent of the University-eligible population who actually get the opportunity for higher education in the country today. They must always pursue excellence in life, advance knowledge and communicate it to the masses, and work for strengthening our democracy.

Remember that the future does not belong to those who are content with today and are indifferent towards larger social causes, new ideas and bold initiatives. It will belong to those who are ever receptive to new ideas and are willing to experiment with them in the interest of the world around them. It is this quality that I would expect the new graduates to carry with them when they are leaving the protective portals of their University.

Friends, a Convocation is a landmark in the lives of the students and the faculty. It is an occasion for the University to take stock of what it has achieved and what it has to aspire for. For all those who pass out today, the coming years would open up various opportunities and at the same time present numerous challenges. Only with total commitment and dedication to the causes with which you get to associate in the years ahead, will you be able to make a mark on the society around you. I hope the scholars will work hard to secure a bright future for themselves and for our country.

Before I conclude, I once again congratulate all those who have successfully completed their courses of study and are receiving their degrees at this convocation. Learning is a lifelong process, which does not end within

the four walls of the University. As you step out of the protective environment of the University, it is a totally different world where new forms of learning await you. Your ability to carve out a place in the highly competitive world will depend on how you cope with the challenges ahead. I sincerely wish that the hopes and aspirations of your days in the University are fulfilled in the years to come. I also hope that you will use the quality education that you have received here to the pursuit of our democratic ideals and for the larger national interests.

I hope this University will continue to produce committed, responsible, disciplined, well-integrated and socially sensitive citizens who will be assets of our country. I convey my best wishes to one and all.

Thank you.

POPULATION IN THE GLOBALIZING SOCIETY: NEED FOR A CONSENSUAL APPROACH*

I am indeed very happy to be here with you this morning at the 22nd Asian Parliamentary Meeting on Population and Development, organized to deliberate on an important theme, namely, *Population in the Globalizing Society*, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IAPPD) and the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA) for organizing this event. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay my respect to the memory of Sat Paul Mittal ji, a veteran parliamentarian, who took the initiative for the establishment of IAPPD, a visionary step in the peculiar context of India. It is significant that this Meeting is being attended by participants from various Asian and CIS countries who will discuss and make their contribution on issues which have impact on sustainable development, going beyond national boundaries and secure the active participation of the elected representatives of the people in population–development integration. The Association's ceaseless endeavours in the last quarter century for sensitizing the elected representatives on the implications of the exponential growth of population and of its consequences deserve appreciation and encouragement. The efforts of the IAPPD in generating awareness among all sections of the population about promoting small family norms through mass campaigns and on other major issues relating to population and health-care, like HIV AIDS for example, and for facilitating a more proactive role for parliamentarians in addressing the issues are, indeed, commendable.

During the last century, the world population has grown from 1.6 billion to 6.1 billion, and about 85 per cent of the growth has been witnessed in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The world population trend shows that it is likely to exceed 8 billion people by 2030. In more developed regions, the number is expected to grow by less than 2 per cent whereas it is estimated that in the less developed regions, it will be by over 40 per cent. Such is the alarming variance in the level of growth of population. But issues relating to population

* At the inauguration of the 22nd Asian Parliamentary Meeting on *Population and Development* organised by the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development and the Asian Population and Development Association, New Delhi (23 April 2006).

growth should not be seen in isolation. Population stabilization has to become the concern of all. In the long run, the whole world will have to reckon with the various dimensions of the problem in the larger perspective of global development.

As we all are aware, the Asia region itself is home to the world's two largest populations, namely, China and India. But, what is important is to facilitate the transformation of our population into an asset by converting it into a high value-added workforce. During the last three decades or so, the Asia-Pacific region has taken a lead to check the population growth by making significant investments in health and education, the beneficial results of which can be measured in terms of reduced infant and maternal mortality, acceptance of smaller family size, higher living standards and eventually the improvement in the status of women. The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 reaffirmed the vital role of population in social development strategies and thus emphasized the dynamic relationship among population, social and economic development, poverty alleviation, the environment and the empowerment of women.

Friends, in our country, at the time of Independence, we had a substantial percentage of our population living below the poverty line. With the rapid increase of our population, successive Governments attempted to implement various programmes with mixed results. Now, the priorities have shifted from family planning to family welfare and from family welfare and population control to population stabilization. According to the Planning Commission projection, the total population of India will exceed 1.3 billion by 2020.

The numerical magnitude of population has caused various political, social and economic changes which have to be addressed. The lack of safe drinking water, electricity, food, problems related to pollution, sanitation, hygiene and waste management, certainly pose a grave challenge to many of the countries of the region. Nobel Laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze have written about the 'compounding' of the impact of population boom and economic growth:

> ... There is a compounding of the impact of population growth and economic growth to which we have to pay attention. Even when the impact of population growth today happens to be small, if we consider the long-run effects of today's population expansion in the light of prospective prosperity in the future, we have to take into account compounded aggregate effects that can be quite large and are likely to grow over time .... In all the spheres of concern to which we have already referred (food and nutritional adequacy, environment

> degradation, infrastructural pressure, etc.) we have to look at the cumulative effects of growth in population size and increase in economic activity.

In this context, we shall have to seriously work out national development strategies which will suit our respective countries most to achieve sustainable and equitable human development and empowerment of the people. Such strategies require us to think beyond providing social safety nets and to focus directly on providing jobs and raising the incomes of the marginalized sections of society. I believe if we want to make any policy a success and action programme more purposeful, we will have to involve the people in the policy processes and encourage their participation at all levels and it is essential that the parliamentarians must actively involve themselves in the task, by seeking appropriate allocation and investment of financial resources for the purpose.

In an increasingly inter-dependent world, population stabilization and good governance are closely inter-related. By factoring our population policies into economic and developmental strategies, we will be able to speed up the pace of sustainable development and poverty alleviation. A more equitable and balanced development of our human resources will be a pivotal component in this regard.

A key factor in this context is education. Our goal should be universal education with special emphasis on girls' education. Women's education will lead to economic independence and will work as a tool for empowering them to decide on issues like spacing child birth and in making gender sensitive choices. Education has, in fact, been rightly identified as the best contraceptive. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's comments in the early years of our freedom merits our special attention here. He said:

> We have to come to grips with this problem of population. It does not become some kind of a theoretical concept. We have to plan in terms of food, clothing, housing, education, health, work, etc., and we realize that some kind of limitation of the rapidly growing population becomes an urgent matter for us. ... the most vital thing in India is for us to advance on the economic and social fronts. If in our eagerness for family planning we ignore this major aspect of economic advance or educational advance, we will be building on wholly insecure foundations. For economic and educational progress is the only foundation on which we can have any effective progress in regard to family planning.

I believe that the people's representatives, as opinion leaders and opinion moulders, can help in sensitizing the Government on the issue and at the

same time educate the masses about the adverse impact of unbridled population growth. In our country, we have in place the National Population Policy, which is one such step in the direction of achieving the national socio-economic goals set for 2010. The increasing involvement of the panahayati raj institutions in ensuring inter-sectoral coordination and local participation in planning, monitoring and management of the programmes for population stabilization will prove to be a great impetus for our developmental plans.

A strong societal and political will has to emerge in favour of creating an enabling environment for a holistic, people-centred approach which will broaden local participation in the programmes for development and population stabilization. Political parties and their leaders should mobilize public opinion on population related issues. All of us should recognize the need for a consensual approach on the critical problems, especially in the context of a globalizing society. The forces that are driving the new world order, however, must recognize that there is no easy solution. Each country has to develop its own approach, based on its native realities, historical factors and social norms. The global organizations should play a facilitating role in this task.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the 22nd Asian Parliamentary Meet on Population and Development. I am sure the Conference will go a long way in bringing about a new vision for an effective and efficient equilibrium between population stabilization and development in the globalizing society. I compliment the organizers for their laudable initiatives and wish them all success in their endeavours.

Thank you.

HINDU COLLEGE ALUMNI: CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY*

I deem it a privilege and an honour to have the opportunity to associate myself with the distinguished alumni award ceremony of the prestigious Hindu College Alumni Association. The Hindu College, with more than a century's remarkable history behind it, has been contributing significantly to the country all these years, in varied ways. Over the years, it has produced generations of Alumni who have distinguished themselves in different spheres of national life. The institution has also played a commendable role during our freedom struggle and later in our nation-building activities in the post-independence years. Everyone associated with the College can take pride in their achievements.

Known for its nationalist spirit, and activism, the Hindu College's involvement with our freedom movement was extremely productive. As is known, it was called the 'Cradle of Nationalism' in the 20th Century. One of the most serious concerns of the College, in the early years of its foundation, was with the growing communal divide in the country. Those were also the years when our freedom movement was gaining momentum and it was perceived by all right-thinking people that for an effective struggle against the imperialist forces, national unity was essential. Many national leaders did exhort the youth of the country into acts of sacrifice and struggle for the cause of freedom during the days of the national movement from the platforms provided by the College to them. Many Leaders and great personalities – like Mahatma Gandhi, Lokmanya Tilak and Jayaprakash Narayan – addressed students of the Hindu College. It talks of the stature and reputation of the College and its association with the events that shaped the country's future.

The values that influenced our freedom movement have not lost their relevance for our country today. In fact they are all the more relevant today than ever before. We should not miss the significance of the message in Gandhiji's address to the College in 1929. Complimenting the composite culture prevalent in the College, in the midst of a divided society, Gandhiji had said: 'Men outside who break one another's heads have gone mad. Students should never be the same. They should set an example to those leaders who keep the communal fire alive... '.

* At the function to give away the Annual Alumni Awards of the Hindu College Alumni Association, New Delhi (29 April 2006).

An institution's place in the life of a country has to be seen in the context of the impact it makes on the society around. The country expects our educational institutions to produce forward-looking, scientific tempered, rational human beings, who will contribute to the progress of the country. With a complex and diverse society as we have, the people, especially our young men and women, should strive for national unity and fight against narrow and divisive ideologies, against superstitions and mythological beliefs and pursue scientific enquiry, which alone can make the country move forward in the highly competitive global environment. Reinforcing national unity and integration is the collective responsibility of all of us. We cannot grow and consolidate ourselves as a nation if we always harp on the issues that divide us from one another.

The College's contribution to the cause of higher education over the years has been commendable. I am sure, it will continue to forge ahead in the coming years in serving the cause of education in the country. Drawing inspiration from its own history, the College should now set still higher standards and targets for itself and should continue to turn out young men and women of high ideals and principles.

The very active Parliament of the Republic of Hindu College, in many ways, is a unique institution. A cursory reading of the Act introducing the Parliament show how well-thought out and complete a scheme it was. Its definition of the powers and responsibilities of different offices under the Republic, of the various terms associated with the Parliament, are very informative and comprehensive. This unique institution, I am sure, helps the youth of the College in identifying themselves with the issues of their time and in preparing themselves in responding to them.

We have a very vibrant democracy. Generations of our people and their leadership have struggled for achieving freedom and for consolidating the gains of freedom and to help assure a dignified existence to our people. Everyone, from the academia to the media, enjoys the idea of politician-bashing or leader-bashing but not many come forward to share the responsibilities of democratic functioning in a proactive way. Criticism alone will not take us forward. You have to volunteer to shoulder the responsibilities for making a qualitative difference.

Taking on the challenges facing the people and the country and contributing to the nation-building activities is what is expected of those who have the benefit of higher education in the country. Only about 6 per cent of the University-eligible age group youth are actually able to enjoy the benefit of higher education in the country today. This unpleasant reality adds to the responsibility on those who have the benefit of education. Rather than being mute witnesses to the injustices in society, to the plight of the weaker sections,

to the erosion of democratic values in our country, to the intrusion of intolerance and divisive trends in our polity, towards corruption and corrupt practices eating into the vitals of the country, the educated should react proactively and contribute to the re-emergence of finer values in our socio-political life.

We all need to recognise that creating certain pockets of affluence is not what development is all about. Nor is city-centric growth the answer to the problems of our country. Development without some acceptable degree of equity cannot make the nation strong. Unless development policies positively impact upon the lives of the ordinary citizens, they will have no meaning for them. The people expect the system to function in an accountable and responsible manner.

I am happy that the Alumni Association under the dynamic leadership of Shri Lalit Bhasin has chosen to honour men and women who have made an impact on their respective fields of work in different ways. You have chosen from a very wide spectrum of activities — from art and culture, to sports and law — each important in its own ways, for the healthy development of our plural society. It is only when we create conditions for every segment of our society to contribute its best for the good of the society that India will one day achieve its due place in the comity of nations. For this, we all have to work together, as a united country, to uplift those sections of our population for whom nearly six decades of freedom has not made much of a difference.

For a country like ours, faced with enormous developmental challenges and socio-political problems, it is imperative to evolve a national consensus on vital issues of national interest. There are certain issues fundamental to the country's existence — development is one among them, national unity and integration is another and consolidation of our democracy is the most important one. To address these issues, all political Parties and the system as a whole, including the academia and the civil society, especially our young men and women, should work together, using above partisanship.

It has been rightly said that during the freedom struggle, the College remained a nucleus of nationalist activities. Students and teachers of the College took keen interest in chalking out strategies to uproot the British. Now may I invite you the past and present students and teachers of this temple of learning to uproot divisiveness, exploitation of the people, illiteracy, poverty, superstitions, corruption, bigotry, and intolerance from our body politic and to strive for all-round excellence which the people of this country are capable of reaching. No citizen of India should be known only by the religion he professes, the caste he belongs to or the language he speaks or by his financial status. He should be known by his contribution towards the

development of the country through principled approach and attitude. I have no manner of doubt that the products of Hindu College can substantially contribute in that respect.

I extend my best wishes to the Alumni Association and to the College in their future endeavours. I must share with you, I have the benefit of the services of two of your Alumni, belonging to the Administrative Service, helping me in running very efficiently the Office of the Speaker — both Dr. Tuktuk Kumar, my Principal Secretary and Mr. Vivek Kumar, my Secretary, are the products of Hindu College. Your decision to honour the products of this prestigious institution, excelling in their respective fields of activities, will enthuse and encourage many to give of their best to the society.

Thank you.

BINDING THE NATION WITH THE VALUES OF HARMONY AND UNDERSTANDING*

I greatly welcome this opportunity to associate myself with the Ramakrishna Jaidayal Harmony Awards ceremony, organized by the Organization of Understanding and Fraternity. The awards have been instituted to honour those who make significant contributions towards promoting national integration and the spirit of fraternity and understanding among the people.

The Organisation's work among the differently abled children, its endeavours for promoting friendship and feeling of fraternity among the people and other philanthropic and charitable works, deserve appreciation and encouragement from everyone. In a country as pluralistic and diverse as India is, only through the cooperation and ceaseless efforts of different well-meaning associations and public-spirited individuals can we hope to achieve national integration and communal harmony among our people and their welfare.

The spirit of Indian nationalism evolved as a historical process during the period of our freedom struggle. Under the leadership of Gandhiji, Pandit Nehru and other leaders, patriotic men and women from all over the Indian subcontinent, professing different faiths, speaking different languages, representing different ideologies and classes joined together to consolidate and strengthen the national movement for freedom. In the wake of freedom, our national leadership, in fact, took great care in ensuring that institutional foundations were laid for establishing a united, progressive and forward-looking country.

Impressing upon the people of India of the importance of harmonious co-existence, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said in 1955:

> We should not become parochial, narrow minded, because we have a great mission to perform. Let us, the citizens of the Republic of India, stand up straight, with straight backs, and look up at the skies, keeping our feet firmly planted on the ground and bringing about this synthesis, this integration of the Indian people. Political

* At the Ramakrishna Jaidayal Harmony Awards Ceremony, New Delhi (15 May 2006).

> integration has already taken place to some extent, but what I am after is something much deeper than that – an emotional integration of the Indian people so that we might be welded into one and made into one strong national unity, maintaining at the same time all our wonderful diversity. I do not want this diversity to be regimented and taken away, but we must be wary of losing ourselves in petty quarrels.....

Nothing should be done to encourage polarization of social and political forces around our diverse religions. We have to be the true inheritors of our own cultural and religious traditions. It is, imperative for all of us to strive unitedly to eliminate from our country the poison of communal hatred, parochial prejudices and sub-regional recriminations. We need to recognize the fundamental truth that religion is not meant to divide people, but to unite them. We must strive unitedly, to hold together the different religious, linguistic, social, regional and ideological groups in our country to make a well-integrated nation. When asked, in the early years of freedom, what his greatest challenge was, Jawaharlal Nehru's answer was: 'to build a secular State in a religious society'. This can be achieved only with the collective efforts of everyone.

No doubt, there are factors, other than religious, contributing to the weakening of national cohesiveness. Development and social equity are important to strengthen our people's resolve for unity among them. General economic well-being is of crucial importance for the larger purposes of national integration. Everyone in our country, even if of different strata, should be made to feel that they have a stake in our national endeavour. This can be achieved by stressing on the need and the essentials of national integration and of humanism. As one of our eminent citizens, Nani Palkhivala, once said: 'National integration is born in the hearts of the citizens. When it dies there, no army, no Government, no Constitution, can save it. States of mind precede States. Inter-faith harmony and consciousness of the essential unity of all religions is at the very heart of our national integration'.

Followers of our different religions should remember that no religious philosophy carries the message of hatred. The essential concern of all the saints, religious leaders, and philosophers has always been the establishment of a just, peaceful and harmonious social order.

Only by strengthening our national fabric and putting an end to communalism, sectarianism and divisiveness can we steadily move forward. Our Founding Fathers had visualized an India free from socio-economic backwardness, inequity, strife and exploitation. It was their dream to build an India, where people of all castes, classes, creeds and religions and all sections of the society would live peacefully and flourish together and

contribute their mite to the building of a strong, progressive and prosperous country. I am sure, occasions like this would help in reminding the country of the imperatives of harmonious co-existence and national integration.

Today by honouring Dr. Ramachandra Murthy, Ms. Judith Keller, Ms. Selina Hossain and Ms. Laila Arzumand Banu — four distinguished persons — with the prestigious Ramakrishna Jaidayal Harmony Awards, for their committed work in their respective fields, identifying themselves with the problems of the people around beyond the issues that divide people from one another and greatly touching their lives in different ways, the Organization of Understanding and Fraternity is contributing towards reinforcing the values of harmony and understanding among the peoples of the world. I extend my best wishes to all of them to continue the good work they are doing in the service of the people.

Thank you.

I am indeed very happy to be present today at the Award Ceremony of the Engineering Export Promotion Council (EEPC). I convey my congratulations to all the award winners. You have contributed to the nation by creating world-class products and services, and you certainly deserve the honour bestowed on you.

Exports play a very vital role in our economy. It is an important source of foreign exchange necessary to maintain the stability of the economy. But to my mind, what is more important, is the fact that our exports demonstrate to the world that India's goods and services can compete with the best in the world and on equal terms.

I am indeed happy to note that the Engineering Export Promotion Council is contributing significantly towards imparting the impetus and the much needed momentum to export promotion. Over the last five decades since its inception, it has emerged as the largest Export Promotion Council and has the distinction of having received the ISO 9002 Certification. Yet another feather in its cap is that it is also the first organisation in India to have achieved ISO 9001 : 2000 Certification for designing and organising exclusive Indian engineering exhibitions abroad. The fact that during the half-a-century of its existence, the Engineering Export Promotion Council of India has been instrumental in increasing the export of engineering goods from a meagre US $ 10 million in 1956-57 to US $18.3 billion during 2005-06 speaks for itself. Over the years, it has also transformed the profile of Indian exports from a supplier of low value commodity items to developing nations to export of value-added capital goods to the developed countries. The Council's motto of making the capital goods products of India globally competitive and of high quality and standard eloquently testifies to its commitment and farsightedness. I am sure that the initiatives and efforts of the Council to showcase Indian products abroad through exhibitions, displays, buyer-seller meets, conferences, workshops, etc., will go a long way in the promotion of export of Indian goods.

India's tremendous achievements have evoked significant global attention in recent years. The Prime Minister as well as the Finance Minister have both

* At the inauguration of the Award Ceremony of the Engineering Export Promotion Council, Kolkata (20 May 2006).

expressed their confidence of our achieving 10 per cent growth rate in the near future. This is a tremendous transformation of the Indian economy. We have indeed come a long way from the time we struggled to sustain a 6 per cent level of growth. It is also a matter of pride that this growth impetus has enveloped every sector, be it agriculture, industry or services. India is demographically a young country today, and this energetic and progressive generation will certainly shape a new dimension of growth given their attitude, their talent as well as their strengths based on a strong socio-cultural heritage. Today, we speak of Indian professionals driving global corporations and institutions. Even our doctors, scientists, lawyers, engineers, management experts and entrepreneurs are contributing to economies all over the world. I understand that we are also on the way to creating Indian multinationals, with a fair amount of business acquisitions abroad. These are indeed exciting times and the dawn of a new confidence in Indian business and industry.

I have been asked to share my views on *Resurgence of Eastern India.* I strongly believe in the inherent strengths of this region and, in a humble way, I have tried to project the strengths to leaders, both in the political sphere and also in the corporate world, for a long time now. I am indeed glad to see the new awakening of interest in this region. In the earlier years, we had to face a lot of skepticism, when we talked of the economic potential of this region, and particularly West Bengal. It is indeed heartening that the ground realities are now visible to progressive investors, who now place an immense amount of confidence in the future prospects of this region. The recent overwhelming victory of the Left Front in West Bengal is a good example of this optimism and echoes the hopes and aspirations of the people and their support to the economic policies enunciated in this region.

It is very important to understand the growth dynamics of Eastern India. There are several important drivers, but given the constraints of time, let me mention just a few. First, the enormous locational advantage of this region. For a long time now, organizations in Kolkata, like the Indian Chamber of Commerce, have highlighted the need to look at Eastern India as the regional hub of South East Asia. We are located at the western tip of a huge Pan-Asian market of 650 million, which not only includes the Asian Tigers, but also the growing economies of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Bangladesh. The purchasing power in this region has increased tremendously, with the impressive growth achieved in many countries of this region. As a result, we see the emergence of a very strong external driver which is influencing growth in Eastern India. Therefore, the new interest that we witness today in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Agricultural Economic Zones in this region is certainly a result of the market dynamics in the ASEAN region as well as in China. Future growth in this region will be intrinsically linked to the developments taking place as a result of the 'Look-East' initiative of the

Union Government. It will also be influenced by the progress in the Free Trade Agreements as well as other Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements with regions like ASEAN and countries like Thailand, Singapore and China. This is a formidable market and a great opportunity for exporters from Eastern India. West Bengal stands to gain considerably from these emerging regional dynamics. However, we need to make sure that these Agreements will truly lead to a two-way traffic in trade and investment and that is indeed one of the challenges that organizations like EEPC must address in the coming years.

Second, Eastern India along with its neighbouring countries comprise a region which stands unparalleled in terms of energy and mineral resources. Whether we speak of oil, gas, hydel-power or resources such as coal, iron ore, and others, we have the potential to become the energy powerhouse of this region. This means that we have the capacity to bring in energy-intensive industries which will have access to quality power at reasonable rates, provided right investments are made in this sector. Given the tremendous opportunity, it is a matter of time before such investments will be made. I am already aware that a large number of projects are looking at energy augmentation within the next two years. This will change the industrial dynamics in this region and can transform the economic landscape considerably in the years ahead.

Third, Eastern India with West Bengal as its lead, is already witnessing a huge shift from our traditional industrial areas of jute, engineering, tea to new areas such as petrochemicals, iron and steel, chemicals and so on. The diversification of this industrial base confirms the re-emergence of eastern India as a manufacturing hub. Till a few years ago, States like West Bengal were acclaimed for the tremendous strides taken in agriculture. I see the same spirit of confidence emerging in the manufacturing sector today. States like Orissa and Jharkhand have also been able to achieve progress in industrial development with significant investment. North East India is turning the corner and there are large corporates earning significant revenues from that region, given the tax benefits extended under the special incentive packages to the north-east. What we are witnessing today is a movement that will establish Eastern India as a major manufacturing base in addition to its successes in agriculture and the services sector. This will be a very important transformation in recent years and have larger ramifications for the future.

The fourth point that I would like to highlight is the strength that we possess in the agriculture sector, particularly the scope for moving up the value chain right from the farm level to the ultimate consumer's door. In recent years, agro products from this region have found a growing market in the United States, Europe, Russia as also the ASEAN region. Several studies

have talked about this agro-potential, and the capability of doubling the State domestic product by properly leveraging our strengths in this sector. A beginning has been made and I am sure that we will see a completely transformed rural sector as a result of these developments. The rural West Bengal alone generates a demand for consumer and industrial goods to the tune of US $ 2.5 billion every year, and represents a market that is growing at 10 per cent every year. With more value addition in agriculture, rural purchasing power will also increase and create a huge demand base for manufactured products as also services. This is evident in States like West Bengal, and I am sure this process will get strengthened in the days to come.

Finally, the huge thrust provided by the services sector. In the last few years, we have seen unprecedented growth in many sectors – be it in IT, IT- enabled services, retail, transportation and logistics, construction, banking, insurance, health-care and so on. This is defining a new future for this region. We are already talking about States like West Bengal having a services sector share of over 54 per cent in the State domestic product. In the next few years, our skills in areas like gems and jewellery, films and entertainment, fashion and industrial design will again provide a new springboard of growth in the services sector. In addition, the growth of the aviation sector will create new opportunities in the tourism sector and particularly bring in more gains to the north-east India.

A booming economy in Eastern India will certainly create opportunities for engineering exports as well. Improved connectivity with the South-East and China, as well as better infrastructure would certainly make you more competitive. I am aware that exporters still have to contend with several issues that distort the level playing field. To my mind, the most important prerequisite for exports is a cost-efficient and quality infrastructure. At the same time, it is important to make ourselves heard and felt in multilateral negotiations and ensure that we have greater access to global markets. We have opened our markets, and now we must see the reciprocity in visible numbers. It is also important to plan ahead with a much bigger vision for the future.

And that brings me to the issue of shaping a shared vision. We often fragment efforts, and lose the larger picture in the process. I am of the firm belief that we must rise above sectoral interests and look at building a future that will have benefits for all. It is not a question whether we should promote engineering exports, agricultural exports or software exports. We need to promote all our strengths in Eastern India. What is more important, however, is to commit ourselves to a vision to make Eastern India a world-class habitat for centres of excellence in industry, agriculture, services, exports, education

and health-care. We may have started late in this developmental race, but today we have the benefit of learning from the rest and replicating world-class success stories in this region.

While I must commend you, as exporters of engineering products and services for achieving a 20 per cent share of India's exports, I think it is also important that we see organizations like the EEPC taking voluntary and affirmative action to demonstrate how they can contribute to a growth process which is more inclusive and equitable. Even as we strive for higher exports and higher growth, we must look at the social aspects of development. This is not just as a measure of corporate responsibility, it is in your enlightened self-interest. Unless we improve the economic conditions, education levels, skills and the quality of life of the vulnerable sections of society, your growth will also be constrained by the lack of skilled human resources. With 12,000 members, you can do a great service to this nation by creating a pool of talent and empowered young Indians, through training and on-the-job skill enhancement, not only to give them an opportunity to live a life of dignity but also to provide you with a human resource base that can contribute much more effectively to achieving the goals of your individual organizations.

I am sure the EEPC will rise to this challenge and help promote an environment of inclusive growth and development. You have shown your capability by creating world-class products and services that compete with the best in the world. Now let us together create a World Class India which we truly deserve and are capable of shaping. Once again my congratulations to all of you for your untiring efforts in creating excellence in your respective fields. My best wishes are with you for all your future endeavours.

Thank you.

I am glad to be here and to associate myself with this Lecture Session on 'Issues pertaining to the Rights of Girl Child'. Today we have with us Ms Razia Ismail Abbasi, Alliance Co-convenor of the India Alliance on Child Rights, to share her views and ideas on this topical subject. I understand that the India Alliance on Child Rights represents a countrywide alliance of networks, NGOs, think-tanks, activists, academia and concerned individuals and is striving for the protection of the rights of the children. Under the dynamic leadership of Ms. Abbasi, the Alliance is spearheading the campaign for safeguarding the rights of the children and for ensuring them an enabling environment for their full physical, mental and social development.

India has one-fifth of the world's children. About 34 per cent of the total population of India are children of 0 to 14 years age group. They need more focused attention as the future of the country depends on our children. When we talk about issues pertaining to the rights of the girl child, I believe, the first and foremost right we must ensure is her right to be born and then the right to live with dignity in an environment permeated by gender equality and sensitivity.

Yet another issue that confronts girls is violence against them which may happen in many ways, including sexual exploitation and abuse, prostitution, child pornography and trafficking. This calls for effective measures so that all forms of violence against the girl child can be eliminated. Perhaps a greater emphasis on strictly enforcing the existing legislations is urgently warranted. We need to forcefully implement the Pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, the Compulsory Registration of Birth and Death Act, and many other existing women and girl child related legislations so as to prevent violence against the girl child. During the last Winter Session, our Parliament passed the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Bill providing for a National Commission and State Commissions for the protection of child rights. It can also monitor the implementation of laws and programmes relating to the survival, welfare and development of children.

Members of Parliament, as the representatives of the people, can also play the role of opinion leaders in their respective constituencies. Because of

* At the Lecture series for Members of Parliament on *Issues Pertaining to the Rights of Girl Child*, organized by the BIST, New Delhi (23 May 2006).

the exalted position they enjoy by virtue of being people's representatives, they can influence and shape the thinking and attitude of the people towards the girl child. Collectively, members can influence the Government to take more proactive measures, and, where necessary, by amending the existing laws, to promote the welfare of the children. As parliamentarians, we can make a substantial contribution in updating children-related laws and in formulating policies that prohibit children's exploitation.

It is hardly necessary to state that the future of a country depends on the kind of facilities available to its children and it is more so for our country where children constitute a large chunk of the population. Issues that confront the children or problems that inhibit their growth, particularly that of the girl child, have to be addressed urgently and holistically. The Beijing Platform for Action has rightly identified the girl child as one of the 12 critical areas of concern that require the attention of all countries. In our country, while the Government is taking various initiatives to bring gender concerns to the centre-stage of public expenditure and policy, we, as parliamentarians, must contribute meaningfully to bridge the gap between women and men and between girls and boys. The constitution of the Parliamentary Forum on Children represents an important step in this direction.

With these words, I am happy to welcome Ms. Razia Ismail Abbasi and request her to share her perspectives on the subject.

Thank you.

KASHMIR: CONTEMPORARY HISTORY AND POLITICS*

I take it as an honour to have been called upon to release Shri Urmilesh's latest addition to the literature on Kashmir, titled *Kashmir: Virasat Aur Siyasat*. This is a commendable addition to his five other interesting volumes on various aspects of national life, which includes another volume on Kashmir, *Jhelum Kinare Dahakte Chinar*, a travelogue, which has earned him the Hindi Academy Award. It is not easy for anyone to effectively blend the pressures of a serious journalistic career with academic and other creative interests. The very fact that it is his sixth work that I have the privilege to release this evening, tells many things about Shri Urmilesh's creativity, his versatile interests and his continuing academic quests without compromising on his commitment to the journalistic profession.

Perhaps, no other subject concerning post-independence India, and in many ways, the entire sub-continent, has attracted so much of attention and interest from within the country and the international community, as has happened in the case of Jammu and Kashmir. It has remained one of the live and most complex issues for the subcontinent, provoking totally contrasting analysis and interpretation, depending mostly on which side of the divide you belonged to in looking at the issue. The stark reality, however, is that the Kashmir problem still remains one of the biggest challenges before the country, significantly impacting the lives of the people of Kashmir besides different aspects of our national life itself.

With my very meagre acquaintance with Hindi, I know I am not the right person to comment on the quality and content of the book. However, the subject matter is of as much interest to me as is to most of us here this evening. I am particularly happy that a serious book, dwelling on the contemporary politics and history of Kashmir has come out in Hindi. There are several thought-provoking books in English but I think this is the first serious attempt in Hindi to record the strife-torn State's turbulent history in the context of the recent twists and turns to the issue. There are several aspects of the Kashmir problem and, as can be seen from the different Chapters, the book deals with many of them. I am told that Shri Urmilesh undertook several visits to the State to study the problem sharing the

* At the release of the book *Kashmir: Virasat Aur Siyasat*, New Delhi (26 May 2006).

perceptions of the different people involved. These efforts, combined with his illustrious academic background, has helped him in presenting the subject matter in a perspective different from the routine.

It is significant that such a book has come out at a time when positive efforts are being made to find a lasting solution to the problem and to the related bigger issue of the normalization of Indo-Pak relations. As the author rightly argues, you have to understand the problem first to find a lasting and acceptable solution to it. I am sure, this book, with its scope for wider reach to a larger cross-section of our population, will help the country in understanding the problem in greater depth and then in addressing the issues involved.

In the Chapter, 'Kashmir Through Partition and Accession', the description of Mahatma Gandhi's first visit to Kashmir is very enlightening. According to the author, if the leadership had taken Gandhiji's views on the State and on its future with the deserving seriousness, the Kashmir problem would not have become so complex today. The Chapter dealing with Sheikh Abdullah's arrest and the dismissal of his Government elaborately deals with the issues that many observers feel to have ultimately led to the Kashmir crisis. The contribution of Sheikh Abdullah to the State and his efforts to build Kashmir are dealt with very sensitively in the book.

There is and there will always be differences in perception on contentious issues, particularly so on an issue as complex as that of Kashmir. I believe that all issues relating to Kashmir, including the Indo-Pakistan dimension of the problem, can be solved through dialogue. The book also mentions about some missed occasions which could have had the potential of arriving at a compromise or a political settlement. However, that cannot affect adopting a positive and pro-active approach by all the stakeholders in the issue today.

Of course, there may be differences of opinion on some of the contentions the author makes, especially about the so-called 'politics behind the Kashmir problem'. The perceptions of the common people who are always at the receiving end of social and political tensions as also of the major players in the scene assume great importance. Shri Urmilesh has blended these perceptions in his endeavour to make this study objective and relevant for the contemporary context.

I am inclined to see the Kashmir issue with optimism. I believe this problem can be solved once and for all. Peace initiatives and the efforts at socio-economic reconstruction of Kashmir and the growing people's craving for peace and disapproval of violence will open up new possibilities for a lasting solution. What is important is to take the people and their leaders along the path of peace and constructive dialogue and not to do anything

that can alienate them from the national mainstream. The participation of people in the last election has been a welcome event. In my several interactions with the leaders and the representatives of the people of Pakistan at different levels, I have found that there is a large body of public opinion which desires peaceful solution to the Kashmir problem and for friendly relations between our countries. I am quite confident that we will achieve this objective in the near future.

Thank you.

INDIAN ADMINISTRATION: POLITICS, POLICIES AND PROSPECTS*

I am happy to be here to release Shri Kamala Prasad's book, *Indian Administration: Politics, Policies and Prospects*. Shri Kamala Prasad served the country as one of the committed civil servants who discharged his responsibilities in various capacities and also in many international organizations including the United Nations. *Indian Administration* is no doubt a significant contribution to the subject. The book provides a first hand information on how Indian administration has evolved in conflicting circumstances since independence and it has also sharply brought out its complexities because of the changing context of Indian polity.

Public administration is Government in practice. Shri Prasad argues that 'the strength of Public Administration is in the integrity of organization and its structured command' and that there is a clear distortion in Indian administration, because of what he calls the importance of 'individuals' as opposed to organization having long-term implications primarily because of the growing subordination of several wings of Indian bureaucracy. Based on the contextual nature of public administration, the book is a commentary on the theoretical advances in the field that may not be apparent unless one is drawn to the interplay of social, economic and political circumstances.

At the core of our parliamentary system is 'accountability', in all its varied manifestations, to the people. The elected representatives, the Executive, the civil servants, all functionaries of State, are all accountable to the people. While the representatives of the people play a vital role in shaping the policies of the Government, the civil servants, as part of the Executive, are entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the approved policies efficiently, honestly and expeditiously.

In a highly pluralistic and developing country like India, we are engaged in a wide range of developmental activities, the nature and magnitude of which would pose a serious challenge to the whole system of administration in any country. The complex dimensions of these themes have been mentioned in a lucid and thought-provoking manner by Shri Kamala Prasad in this volume.

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* At the release of the book *Indian Administration: Politics, Policies and Prospects*, New Delhi (29 May 2006).

The Indian public administration's hierarchical structure was something which was bequeathed to us by the British, but in the post-independence years we have modified them to suit the native realities. The Constituent Assembly Debates throw light on the factors and considerations that prevailed on the Founding Fathers in retaining the public administration structures as also how they conceived the role of the post-colonial bureaucratic system. Thus, while accepting the 'steel frame' of the British bureaucracy for its structural utility, the Founding Fathers sought to radically alter its nature by relocating its functioning within the new system of democratic governance.

In the nearly sixty years since Independence, the contents and contours of our public administration have undergone drastic transformation, having both positive and negative aspects. Undoubtedly, the dynamics and complexities of a billion plus society with extreme plurality have had its impact on our public administration as well. As we all know, in the last two decades or so, there has been a sea-change in the public perception about the quality of governance that we expect for ourselves. We have to fulfil our constitutional promise to channelize the benefits of progress and growth to the lowest strata of our people and our public policy should be equitable, inclusive and based on sound democratic norms. For this, all of us should be committed to the ideals of social justice, governmental functions should be effectively decentralized, and economic policies should take care of all, especially the vulnerable sections. We have all to make endeavours to promote a social and political order which strengthens effective partnership among all stakeholders to enhance the capacity of the civil society to infuse the concept of accountability and transparency in administrative actions. These issues are dealt with by Shri Kamala Prasad in a perceptive manner in his volume.

Public administration is not merely governance but also a process in which administration is meaningfully articulated. Following the onset of globalization, the traditional bureaucratic model has perhaps lost its significance presumably because of the growing importance of the non-state actors in administration. One can thus safely argue that while the twentieth century was the age of organization where bureaucracy symbolized the core values of public administration, the twenty-first century has ushered in an era of 'network-based organization', drawn on neo-liberal values.

In a highly diverse society like ours, who will be primarily responsible, for the delivery of the benefits of development to the people? I believe all will agree that the efficacy of any government policy depends as much on how wisely it is formulated as on how effectively it is implemented. While the civil servants share the responsibility with the politicians to shape and implement public policy, the politicians have to undergo direct public scrutiny periodically for the quality of policies and their execution, as accountability

is the basis of our democratic structure and has to be rendered periodically by the people's representatives. Ultimately, it is the decision of the political masters that has to prevail and they will have to bear the ultimate responsibility. Thus, it will hamper proper execution of the policies and programmes if there is, as the author states, 'increasing gulf between the masters and the administrators and the increasing distrust resulting in prevarication by the organs of the State to defend legitimate action, which tends to force administration to avoid or escape from responsibility'. We should expect greater involvement of the civil servants with the various stages of public policy, closer coordination between the political leadership and the civil servants and strengthening of the existing accountability mechanisms for those who implement policies. The ultimate policy-makers should welcome well-considered and well-intentioned suggestions from the civil servants, while taking the ultimate responsibility therefor.

It is in this context that we should all be concerned at what the author refers to as the politicization of the civil service. Shri Prasad deserves appreciation for having articulated his sharp views on what he calls the growing politicization of public bureaucracy. According to him: 'politicization simply means that the administrator adopts, willingly or unwillingly, a posture that makes him a party to partisan implementation'. The failure of Indian bureaucracy to rise above partisan interests is what contributed to its decline. And, also, the inherent tendency to subvert the well-established procedures and regulation by the politicization sustains 'this vicious circle'. He further observes that the politicized bureaucracy tends to 'promote what has come to signify sensitivity to the wishes of political representatives, the ministers and their close allies', To him one of the principal reasons of this is the 'desire of the political authority' to subvert the administrative rules and regulations. In Shri Prasad's assessment, 'the subversion of public administration' by the political authority has gravely damaged Indian administration. 'Words from the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister' have thus in his view 'assumed the value of law in most cases'. As a result, Shri Prasad laments, 'a situation develops in which the general interests are sacrificed at the altar of preferred interests'. On the basis of his argument, Shri Prasad thus makes a fundamental assertion by saying that in the systemic failure of Indian administration, the role of civil service cannot be wished away. This point is most persuasive not only because it comes from a former bureaucrat who retired as the Chief Secretary of a State, but also because it has drawn our attention to a process of decline of 'the steel frame' due to what he refers to as the clear politicization for narrow and sectarian interests.

Our Founding Fathers, while drafting the Constitution, were aware of this situation, and they felt it was necessary to define the dividing line between the respective domains of Ministers who have to apply political discretion

and the neutrality of civil servants who have to implement the government policies. The question remains no doubt, whether the system has been able to maintain the sanctity of that constitutional paradigm.

Corruption is a serious blot on our civic and political life. It was a major concern when India became free. Shri Prasad has drawn our attention to the sources of corruption by saying that 'the bribe-giver is as much a guilty party as the bribe-taker'. The business community and the powerful industrial houses have contributed to this menace which has assumed disastrous proportions simply because of the nexus between the Government and beneficiaries. In public administration, Shri Prasad has identified several factors that create space for corruption and has identified some steps to control the same. But there can never be a permanent solution unless 'the ingrained lust' of the individuals is drastically moderated, as Shri Prasad firmly believes. This is where there is the 'importance of ethics in public life'. In his words, 'integrity is thus located in the culture of public sphere as a whole in which administration is an instrument of rationality, continuity, responsibility and accountability'. The administration must be reinvented in the field and in contact with and relation to the people involved. The administration should be designed to be 'people-centric' and not otherwise. Administration needs to be truly 'decentralized' in the sense of the involvement of the stakeholders at the grassroots. Unless this is done, administrative reforms will largely remain 'academic' without any application whatsoever.

It is imperative to enlarge the scope of public scrutiny of all those who are concerned with the execution of public policy. In this regard, substantial contribution is being made by various Parliamentary Committees, which, over the years, have enlarged the scope of parliamentary surveillance on administrative actions. The meetings of the Parliamentary Committees provide a very good opportunity for interaction between the legislators and the higher civil service. It is a learning experience for both of them. While the legislators can benefit from the perspectives of the Government, the civil servants can get to feel the pulse of the people from the people's representatives. The relationship between the two should not be adversarial or confrontationist but should be complementary to and supportive of each other.

No doubt, we have to make constant efforts to strengthen and innovate effective means to ensure that our administration remains sensitive and accountable to the urges and aspirations of the people and that it responds responsibly and implement government policies with a sense of commitment to the cause of the socio-economic emancipation of the teeming masses.

What should be the *modus operandi* to make administration more citizen-centric? We should try to provide sufficient space to the people to participate

in the political and developmental processes at all levels, particularly at the grass-roots level. For this, we must effectively decentralize our administration and empower people in such a way that they have a say in local projects. The local self-government institutions that came into being after the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments have gone a long way in fulfilling the long-cherished dream of broad-based democracy, which make the lower units of administration at the grass-roots levels more responsive, more socially conscious and more constructively involved in developmental activities. The onus is on the public administrative apparatus in the country, especially the rural bureaucracy, to cope with the emerging challenges in this increasingly decentralized administrative hierarchy.

On another plane, if we have to carve out opportunities out of a highly competitive global economy, we must send out a strong message to all concerned that the administration is for the people as a whole and not for a select few. No doubt, for this to happen, there has to be a change of mindset. Public servants should realize that their efficiency is going to be measured not in terms of their conduct as regulatory agents of the State machinery, but in terms of their conduct as effective facilitators of development, addressing the concerns of the people. At the same time, we must ensure that the ethical norms for public servants are properly identified; that there exists an effective monitoring system to make a continuous evaluation of administrative actions; and that we send out a clear message at all levels of administrative machinery to so conduct themselves that they help reinforce the faith of the people in the system of Government we have.

It is widely held that secrecy often veils administrative actions, tending to increase corrupt practices, which, as the author very rightly says, 'erodes trust that places priority on public interest'. If we have to root out corruption, we should provide the people easy access to information relating to administrative decisions. It is being felt rightly that the strongest incentive for good governance lies in people being taken into confidence about the contents and contours of policies and about the factors and considerations that go into public policy-making. The Right to Information Act is expected to address these concerns. It is, however, important that our civil servants remain sensitive to the spirit of this Act so that the goals of a responsive and informed democracy could be realized in a purposive and meaningful manner.

On the whole, as Shri Kamala Prasad stresses that there has been widespread concern about reforming public administration in India. As we all know, several new challenges have drastically impacted on the domain of economic activity and we must look at alternative administrative structures, fine-tune our processes and procedures and develop a conducive work culture which can enable us to make administration more accountable, transparent

and people-friendly. This will also require the strengthening of civil society institutions and various democratic forces in the public domain in such a manner that the goals of equity and sustainability are not compromised in the pursuit of efficiency. In this regard, I am inclined to agree with the author when he says: '...it should never be ignored that any reform has to be consistent with parliamentary accountability and it would be dangerous to locate reforms in ideological zeal, perceived failure or environment of crisis. That makes reforms piecemeal and lopsided.'

The publication *Indian Administration* is a significant contribution to the subject of public administration largely because of its thematic richness and diversity of public administrative issues. The book provides significant intellectual inputs to those interested in grasping the complexities of the processes in which public administration is articulated and made to act. I compliment Shri Prasad on having lucidly written about Indian administration with reference to its immediate past and contemporary manifestation. M/s Pearson and Longman also deserves to be heartily commended for having placed this book at our disposal.

With these words, I have great pleasure in releasing the book *'Public Administration: Politics, Policies and Prospects'* by Shri Kamala Prasad. I am sure, the book will help policy-makers, academics and students alike to explore the dynamics of Indian administration and, as the author says, how it can be equipped to facilitate change.

Thank you.

WHAT SHOULD BE PARLIAMENTARIANS' PRIORITIES TO REDUCE POVERTY?*

I deem it an honour and privilege to have been given this opportunity to present a keynote paper in this Conference on the theme *'What Should be Parliamentarians' Priorities to Reduce Poverty?'*, a subject of immense contemporary relevance. Fighting Poverty is the biggest development challenge faced by humanity. While most countries have achieved varying degrees of success in improving the quality of life of their citizens, the existence of poverty in almost every region of the world is a stark reality that stares us in our face. Globally, about 1.2 billion people, nearly one-fifth of the world population, are still living in extreme poverty, and the majority of them are in Asia and Africa.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional problem. It is being increasingly recognized that being 'income-poor' or 'consumption-poor' is not the only dimension of poverty. In the larger context, poverty is to be seen as a state of deprivation, implying the inability of a person to satisfy his (or her) minimum needs, for leading a reasonably productive life. Seen in this light, poverty can be taken to be a denial of fundamental human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 states: 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services.' Poverty is denial of these basic services.

Prof. Amartya Sen has given the concept of poverty a new dimension, where poverty is treated as denial of choices and opportunities for leading a tolerable life. In Prof. Sen's perspective, poverty denotes a condition in which a person lacks the opportunity to achieve a 'minimally acceptable level of functioning'. This includes not only physical or tangible attributes like nourishment, clothing, shelter and living a disease-free life but also intangible attributes like education, participation in community life, living with dignity etc.

Given the fact that poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, the anti-poverty programmes being currently implemented in many developing

* At the CPA/Wilton Park/World Bank Institute Conference on *Reducing Poverty: The Role of Parliaments, Governments and Non-State Actors*, Wiston House, West Sussex, United Kingdom (5 June 2006).

countries are essentially poverty-amelioration programmes; and, understandably, these can help in only reducing the intensity of poverty rather than eliminate poverty completely. For the eradication of poverty, what is required is the enhancement of people's capabilities.

Democracy and its institutions are seen by many as being too ponderous and slow, and therefore, ill-equipped for mounting an all-out attack on poverty. I subscribe to the opposite view that it is the representative institutions and participatory processes of democracy that offer the most effective means of addressing a multi dimensional problem like poverty. Today, Parliaments across the developing world are addressing the urgent task of poverty amelioration, each in its own unique manner, by endeavouring to deliver good governance.

It is now widely acknowledged that poverty can be most effectively tackled in a democracy, where the poorest sections of society have become enfranchised and, thus, have a voice in Government. Involving the elected representatives of the people in the process of poverty-reduction is necessary for the sustainability of the process, as also for conferring legitimacy on it. The major challenge before parliamentarians is to build an 'inclusive system of governance' that will facilitate equitable growth and mitigate poverty, and to empower the poor to enable them to participate in the growth process. For this, parliamentarians must work in close cooperation with their respective Governments, civil society organisations and other development partners for providing policy guidance, mobilizing resources and channelising them to pro-poor programmes. The message that parliamentarians need to disseminate is: the more the democracy and accountability, the more robust the attack on poverty; the more inclusive and participatory the decision-making process, the greater its chances of successful implementation. Therefore, national Parliaments must decentralise and delegate more, not less, to sub-national tiers of governance, down to the village councils.

As a well-known author has observed, 'democracy is a weapon in favour of the poor, but it has to be deployed with imagination. ...What is important is that governance should not make their lives worse but try and make them better.' In such a scenario, another priority before the parliamentarians in the process of poverty reduction should be the enhancement of the participation of the poor in governance.

Empowering the poor should be an important priority for parliamentarians. To make the State institutions more responsive to the needs of the poor, it is essential that the political voice of the poor be strengthened. There is no denying the fact that powerlessness in the political realm is both a cause and result of poverty. In many political systems, the poor are politically marginalised, having little opportunity to influence the policies that impact

upon their lives. Several studies suggest that civil and political rights are intimately associated with higher rates of economic growth, lower corruption and poverty reduction.

The historic Right to Information Act, passed by the Indian Parliament in 2005, arms ordinary citizens with the power to ask Government agencies for information and have it, through a well-defined procedure. An informed citizenry is an essential pre-requisite for a healthy democracy. It is only appropriate that the Government authorities make disclosures about their decision-making, particularly of decisions that impinge on the lives of the ordinary citizens. I am of the firm belief that greater transparency will render the system more efficient, responsive, equitable and just.

With an objective to rid the world of poverty and to improve the lot of humanity, the leaders of the world adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the UN Millennium Summit, on 8 September 2000. The goals, *inter alia*, call for reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day; reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, between 1990 and 2015.

To achieve this laudable goal, nation States have devised their own Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Processes, to establish a multi-tier framework for national poverty reduction. It has been pointed out by the UNDP and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, in one of their publications in the series — *Parliaments and Poverty*, that while the specifics of the PRS process vary from country to country, they involve four main stages — (i) poverty diagnosis, (ii) poverty policy formulation, (iii) poverty policy implementation and (iv) monitoring and evaluation. In each of these stages, parliamentarians can create greater space for themselves.

Admittedly, the poverty reduction process is explicitly a Government-led exercise, but parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in exercising continuous oversight of governmental actions. Through this, they can assure the best possible use of the resources for poverty eradication, help maintain financial transparency in the appropriation of poverty-related funds, extend policy advice from time to time and give legislative support to ensure that the interests of the poor are taken care of.

Reaffirming this, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) unanimously adopted a Resolution at their 108th Conference held in Santiago de Chile on 11 April 2003. The Resolution, *inter alia*, (i) called on all the Parliaments and parliamentarians to enact not only measures that focus on facilitating economic growth, but more particularly those that empower people and promote their welfare and development; (ii) endorsed the Brussels Declaration and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDC) for the Decade

2001-2010 and emphasized, in particular, the need for effective implementation of the Programme relating to good governance at national and international levels; and (iii) called on the Parliaments of the developed countries to work towards the goal of earmarking at least 0.7 per cent of GNP as Official Development Assistance for global human development.

India has adopted a three-pronged strategy for reducing poverty in the rural and urban areas. The strategy consists of: (i) acceleration of economic growth with a focus on sectors which are employment intensive; (ii) human and social development through provision of basic minimum services; and (iii) targeted anti-poverty programmes. The main parameter for estimating the poverty in India, is the 'per capita consumption expenditure' which meets the average per capita daily calorie requirement of 2,400 cal in rural areas and 2,100 cal in urban areas, along with a minimum non-food expenditure on vital requirements such as clothing, shelter and transport, etc. Persons with monthly per capita expenditure below the prescribed limit of Rs. 327.56 in rural areas and Rs. 454.11 in urban areas are considered to be living below the poverty line (BPL).

There has been a significant decline between 1977-78 and 1999-2000 in the proportion of people living below the poverty line from 51.3 per cent to 26.1 per cent, and in the absolute number of poor, from 328.9 million to 260.3 million. However, in spite of the sharp decline in poverty in the country as a whole, there are wide variations in the incidence of poverty across States. This apart, there is a rural-urban divide, with the problems of unemployment and under-employment more pronounced in the rural areas.

All national Governments in India since 1950 have emphasised poverty alleviation as the central plank of their economic policies. Presently, the Indian Government is targeting to cover every village with electricity, telephone, safe drinking water, minor irrigation, and all-weather roads by the year 2009, at an estimated cost of Rs. 1740 billion, to boost rural infrastructure.

Under the Rural Housing Scheme, 1.53 million housing units are to be constructed this year at a cost of Rs. 29 billion. Under the Antyodaya Food Scheme, 35 kg. of food grains per month are being supplied to about 25 million poor families at highly subsidised rates. Another food scheme, 'Annapurna' provides 10 kg. of food grains free of cost per month to those senior citizens, who are eligible for pension under the National Old Age Pension Scheme but are not covered under it yet.

In a representative democracy, it is the responsibility of the Parliament to articulate public grievances and to resolve tensions, and maintain equilibrium between competing claims for scarce resources, in order to enhance cohesion and solidarity in the civil society. To determine the root causes of poverty-

related problems of his constituency, a parliamentarian needs to study the social, political, economic and other obstacles in the way of development schemes and programmes undertaken by governmental agencies. Such an exercise would reveal the gaps in the existing policies and implementation mechanisms, and enable him to come out with suitable correctives.

A parliamentarian can effectively redress problems of the poor people of his constituency, only if he makes full use of the parliamentary devices available to him and also participates energetically and effectively in all legislative, financial and other business of the House. By using various parliamentary devices as instruments of enforcing accountability and influencing policy, parliamentarians can play a vital role in goal prioritisation, policy formulation, and allocation of resources for poverty reduction.

Parliamentarians have a significant role to play in influencing the Government's poverty alleviation programmes through the Budgetary process. A Budget reflects the fundamental values underlying the national policy of the Government of the day. Parliamentarians, irrespective of their party affiliations, can influence the drafting of the Budget when it is discussed in Parliament and can render its provisions more equitous and balanced.

In India, we have been implementing a series of rural and urban poverty alleviation programmes within the framework of the country's national Five-Year Plans. In 2005, rising above their political differences, our parliamentarians unanimously enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which recognises the right to work as a fundamental legal right and entitles the rural poor to guaranteed employment for one hundred days in a year. The Budget provision for this scheme for the current financial year is Rs. 113 billion.

In India, we have a system of Departmentally Related Standing Committees, vested with powers to examine in detail the working of various Ministries and Departments. A parliamentarian's membership in the parliamentary committees gives him an opportunity to exchange views and ideas with members of other political parties. Through these Committees, parliamentarians get a chance to interact with the administration implementing anti-poverty programmes and they strive to ensure that the amounts voted by Parliament for poverty reduction are spent for the purposes for which they are sanctioned. Strengthening of the parliamentary committees can play a crucial role in helping parliamentarians address the serious challenge of poverty in a more effective and imaginative manner.

We also have a unique scheme called the 'Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme', which enables every parliamentarian to recommend development works for the creation of durable community assets and provision of basic facilities. Through this scheme, our parliamentarians

have been meeting the genuine needs of their poor constituents by providing them drinking water facilities, primary school buildings, electricity extention schemes, primary health centres, minor irrigation schemes, non-conventional energy schemes etc.

In most developing countries, non-state actors *i.e.* civil society has emerged as a viable institutional framework to serve as a catalyst for development and change. It is widely believed that NGOs perform better than the Government in reaching marginalised sections, identifying and responding to their needs, promoting peoples' participation and evolving micro-level, cost-effective alternatives. They are instrumental in organising the poor to enable them pursue their self-development and to fight for their rights.

Parliamentarians will have to recognize NGOs or non-state actors as important players in the fight against poverty. Any strategy of poverty alleviation will be incomplete without the involvement of civil society actors such as NGOs. In the recent past, India has witnessed the emergence of a large number of community-based organisations, self-help groups, cooperatives and trade unions in the unorganised sector. Enabling the poor to form their own organisations is an important step in the process of their empowerment as it gives them a collective voice in the political arena, enhancing their bargaining power.

The real wealth of a nation is its people, both women and men. Gender perspectives are, therefore, also quite important in the process of poverty reduction. The causes and outcomes of poverty are highly differentiated between women and men, particularly because of the unequal access to and control over productive resources and decision-making. Gender equality is a precondition for, and an indicator of, sustainable development and poverty reduction. There is a global consensus on the need for gender-mainstreaming with full involvement of the elected representatives of the people in this vital process. The discrimination against women in health and education at the societal level and their unequal representation in the political and economic decision-making processes are some of the major gender issues that require urgent attention of the parliamentarians. Gender budgeting will be a welcome initiative in this regard.

Like women, children, particularly those belonging to the deprived sections of society, are the worst sufferers. Growing up in poverty affects their physical, social and psychological development, the long-term effects of which can be crippling. We have to address the problem of child labour, which emanates essentially out of poverty, in country-specific contexts. By advocating children-centric public policies, parliamentarians can meaningfully mitigate poverty among children and contribute to a healthy and productive human resource base. The Parliament of India passed the historic

86th Constitutional Amendment Act in 2002 making education a Fundamental Right of every child and mandating the State to provide for free and compulsory education upto the age of 14.

The key lesson that has emerged from decades of struggle to reduce poverty is that policies and programmes that originate from society and whose contents reflect needs and popular aspirations, are more likely to be successfully implemented. For designing, implementing and monitoring policies and programmes, an active and committed leadership on the part of parliamentarians, individually at the constituency level and collectively at the national level, is an essential input to every country's poverty reduction strategy. Working in close cooperation with the Governments and non-state actors, parliamentarians irrespective of their party affiliations, have to tirelessly strive not just to reduce poverty but eventually to eradicate it.

Adebayo Olukoshi of the Nordic Africa Institute rightly points out 'Democracy is difficult to build on empty stomachs' and that 'effective governance is often the missing link between anti-poverty efforts and poverty eradication.' In the ultimate analysis, as Scott Hubli and Alicia Mandaville have argued in their study on Parliaments and Poverty Reduction: 'Greater parliamentary involvement in the poverty reduction strategy process helps to ensure that a country's poverty strategy is generated, implemented and evaluated through national institutions with adequate political legitimacy to ensure ownership and sustainability.' That being so, parliamentarians, by securing accountability and good governance in the administration and management of all pro-poor activities and programmes, must necessarily become proactive partners in the continuing crusade against poverty.

Poverty has both national and international implications. As the world becomes smaller, poverty anywhere becomes a threat to prosperity and peace everywhere, and in the larger sense, it also undermines the foundations of democracy. While on the face of it, the problem of poverty may be seen as a country-specific one, it is in the interest of the international community to recognise that the ramifications are often global.

Rather than looking at the developing countries merely as potential markets, helping them along the path of development should also be seen as part of the larger responsibilities of the developed world. Parliamentarians, representing the people in the Government and as opinion-builders and policy-makers, have to prevail on national Governments to work for the establishment of a more equitable world order. South-South co-operation is much more than an expression of solidarity. It can mean tangible benefits in economic terms for the developing world. This is where the member nations of the Commonwealth need to work together through their Parliaments and parliamentarians.

If a small part of the global expenditure on military and arms race is diverted to poverty-eradication programmes, for the poverty-stricken one fifth of the global population, our world would become a better place to live in. Campaigns for the eradication of poverty, to be really effective, need to be launched as a global one, with full involvement of parliamentarians, national Governments, international organizations and development agencies.

We need to recognise the right of the poor for a dignified existence as not only the most fundamental human right across the world but also a pressing and urgent pre-condition to building a stable world order. Facilitating that is one of the major developmental challenges for parliamentarians everywhere, more so, in the developing countries. Developing a national consensus on fighting poverty, showing the requisite political will to democratise and decentralise at a greater pace, utilising Parliament as a tool to empower and enable the poor, showing greater commitment to reducing corruption and increasing accountability and transparency in governance systems are the priorities that we parliamentarians, need to build on, in our fight against poverty. Let us resolve to work together and make our Parliaments tools of ensuring faster growth and prosperity, along with equity and justice to our peoples.

Thank you.

HEALTH-CARE SCENARIO IN INDIA*

I deem it an honour and a privilege to have the opportunity to associate myself with the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the West Bengal Branch of the Indian Public Health Association (IPHA). Over its five decades of existence, the Association has been effectively complementing the efforts of the State Government in addressing the health-care concerns of the people of the State, particularly of rural Bengal.

Through its various programmes to enhance awareness about health-related matters among the people, its continuing medical education programmes, covering all important areas of general concern of the health-sector, for the benefit of the officials of the Health Directorate of the State and through them of the people of the State, and through its low-cost intervention research activities, among others, it has been contributing significantly to the health and well-being of the people. Represented as it is by members from all related fields including doctors, public health nurses, social scientists, public health engineers, veterinarians, social workers, health educationists, statisticians, environmentalists and the other streams of public health, the Association is playing an important role in evolving an integrated approach to the problems of the health-sector in the State.

Today, with the collective endeavours of all these professionals under the leadership of the State government, the West Bengal is presenting acceptable indices of development in some of the important areas relating to health. Over the years, there has been an attitudinal change among substantial sections of our people towards diseases and their cure. Our medical community has contributed significantly in improving the life-span of our people, in eradicating several diseases, in increasing the health awareness among the people and in inculcating a better sense of hygiene among the masses. Today, India is among the favoured destinations for people from even developed countries, for quality health care at an affordable rate. These are all commendable achievements. This, however, does not give reasons for being complacent and we still have major challenges to meet. When we consider the magnitude of the problems of our health-care sector and the totality of the health-care scenario in the country, we will realize that perhaps, no other area requires more concerted national endeavour as does this sector.

* At the inauguration of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Indian Public Health Association, Kolkata (15 July 2006).

What is most important is to help create conditions for taking the benefit of the spectacular advances in medical sciences achieved in the previous century to the people across the country. This, to my mind, is the challenge before the medical fraternity today, both for the professional doctors and the administrators of the health sector.

We still have a long way to go in addressing the needs of the poor and the rural population of the country. There are still very disturbing statistics that we are reckoning with. It is a matter of shame for all of us that every fourth child on the globe who dies of diarrhoea is an Indian; every fourth person in the world dying of water-borne or water-related diseases is an Indian; that of the over 16 million TB cases that exist anytime world-wide, nearly 12 million are in India; that TB kills nearly four lakhs people in the country every year; that we have one of the poorest doctor-population ratios in the world; that only about 20 per cent hospital beds are available for the rural population which constitute nearly seventy per cent of our population. And in spite of all these, our expenditure on public health, at just about 1 per cent of our GDP, is one of the lowest in the world! This gap in investment, combined with several other problems related to underdevelopment, leave much more to be accomplished in the health-care sector. We still do not have enough doctors and nurses to cater to the needs of our vast population, particularly in our villages. A substantial section of our people do not have easy access to modern health-care services.

These issues can be effectively addressed only with the committed endeavours of the Government, the civil society organizations, the corporate sector and the entire medical community. The National Health Policy, conceived in 1983, had set the goal of 'Health for All' by the year 2000. Primary health care was the main instrument through which we were to achieve this goal.

We need to have a policy framework to pool together the efforts of all the concerned agencies to address the health care issues. We have to mobilize our resources and get the objective of 'Health for All' as a priority item in our national agenda. Keeping in view our socio-economic and developmental conditions, we have to produce medical practitioners who are equipped to meet the health problems of our people, especially in our villages. We have to ensure that there is an equitable distribution of health-care facilities throughout the country. Nearly two-thirds of our population live in our villages. What is most important is an attitudinal change among our medical professionals – a readiness to reach out to our villages and serve them with dedication. They should remember that in training them as doctors, our country spends a substantial amount on them. They should pay back their debts to the society by coming forward to serve those who need them the most.

As you may be aware, there are still thousands of villages in our country where expectant mothers do not get the necessary pre-natal medical care and finally have to give birth only with the assistance of local unqualified mid-wives. This is one of the reasons why our infant and maternal mortality rates are one of the highest in the world. Only if our medical professionals come forward to serve in our villages and the remote corners of the country can we effectively address such issues. Along with quality, we also need to augment the strength of the medical professionals in the country. All sections of the population, particularly from the rural areas, should get increasing opportunity for medical education so that we can produce more and more professionals better inclined to serve in the rural and remote areas of the country.

Yet another area where we could devote our attention is towards evolving methods for the production of drugs within the country on the basis of the processes and techniques developed here so that the patent laws will not become a cause for high cost and an impediment to the production process. For this it is imperative that our own pharmaceutical companies increase their investment in Research and Development, and the developed and developing countries cooperate with each other in sharing technology and information in this regard. There are still many diseases eluding our search for effective cure. Only through research will we be able to find effective cure for them.

Friends, fifty years of existence is a long period in the life of an institution. Over the last five decades, the IPHA has made its own mark on various aspects of the health-care management of the State. This could be done only with the commitment and dedication of all those associated with it all these years. I hope, in this Golden Jubilee Year, the IPHA will resolve to continue to dispense its tasks in the larger public interest and function with renewed vigour and an even greater sense of dedication and commitment to serve the people. I extend my congratulations to IPHA on this occasion and wish that it crosses other important milestones in the years ahead, in the process going up in the esteem of the people for whom it is designed to serve. With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate your Golden Jubilee Celebrations.

Thank you.

TACKLING THE MENACE OF AVIAN INFLUENZA*

I deem it an honour to have the opportunity to associate myself with this important Asian Regional Conference of the Ministers of Health, Agriculture and Livestock Departments on-*Avian Influenza Control and Pandemic Preparedness in Asia*, in New Delhi. I am happy to learn that the Ministers of this region, heading such crucial Departments, have come together to deliberate on the latest threat of avian influenza looming large over humanity in different parts of the world, including in our region. Viruses do not respect national or international boundaries and I think it is of importance that the Governments of the region and the global bodies take note of the threat which has the potential to become a pandemic, if suitable preventive steps are not initiated well in time.

The outbreaks of avian influenza in Asia among poultry have been historically unprecedented in its geographical scope, spread and consequences. These outbreaks have resulted in the loss of huge poultry resources with significant socio-economic consequences to countries of the Asian region. Never in recent history have so many countries been so widely affected by a disease of this magnitude. Already there are indications that the virus is beginning to be transmitted among human beings also. This can be effectively checked only if we contain its outbreaks among the carriers of this disease, particularly among poultry and wild birds, at the earliest.

The magnitude of the threat, therefore, warrants comprehensive collaborative efforts—both nationally and internationally. Political commitment at the highest level and regional cooperation are necessary to strengthen the capacity of the countries of the region to respond to the problem. The recent experience with the reported cases of avian influenza in poultry in a few Indian States has emphasized the need for immediate inter-sectoral response for effectively containing the outbreak. The pivotal role of Animal Husbandry Department in initiating appropriate preventive measures reinforces the need of joint meetings of Ministers of Health, Agriculture and Livestock.

Aware as we are of the potential of this virus to cause a human influenza pandemic, it is of crucial importance to evolve mechanisms for effective

* At the inauguration of the Conference of Ministers of Health, Agriculture/Livestock on *Avian Influenza Control and Pandemic Preparedness in Asia*, New Delhi (28 July 2006).

cooperation among the countries of the region in developing our capacities for the early detection and containment of an outbreak anywhere in our region or anywhere else in the world.

The voluntary adoption of International Health Regulations (IHR-2005) is an important first step in tackling emerging diseases. In conformity with the IHR-2005, all countries should be committed to cooperate and collaborate with each other and with the relevant international organisations for facilitating prompt and transparent exchange of information and for sharing the material necessary for combating the virus. We should be ever prepared to contain the threat and even to face a pandemic, if it so happens in spite of our best efforts, by developing reliable information input on the problem and building awareness, engaging the medical and public health services effectively and by encouraging research for developing new technologies, including vaccines and new means of treatment to deal with the virus. In all these, cooperation between countries of the region is very important. We must not forget that unlike many other diseases, the avian influenza threat will not be localized. Therefore, strategies for dealing with the problem also should be evolved jointly by all those who could be its potential victims.

I hope, your deliberations in New Delhi have been fruitful. I am happy to note that you have worked on a comprehensive Delhi Declaration at this Conference. In fact, it is relevant even for the other regions. I am sure, all the participating countries and the other countries of the region will work together with commitment in following up and implementing the actions decided in the 'Delhi Declaration' in an expeditious way.

Thank you.

This morning, we have in our midst the internationally acclaimed economist Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs to speak to our Hon'ble Members of Parliament. Prof. Sachs has a wide-range of intellectual accomplishments to his credit and has advised the Governments of many countries and international institutions on the challenges of hyper-inflation, extreme poverty, disease, etc. Drawing on his remarkable scholarship and rich and varied experience, he has offered solutions to the economic, social, political and environmental problems which many nations are confronted with today.

Prof. Sachs will be addressing us this morning on 'India's Challenges to Meet the Millennium Development Goals'. While Prof. Sachs has wide-ranging first-hand experience of revitalising the economy of several countries, having been economic advisor to their respective Governments, he has also got a deep insight into the dynamics of the Indian economy which he has been studying for a fairly long time.

The imperative of achieving the Millennium Development Goals for the welfare of the people can hardly be overemphasized. These internationally agreed goals to alleviate extreme poverty, disease and hunger, reduce child mortality, achieve universal primary education, improve maternal health, facilitate gender equality, combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases, among others, by the year 2015, have to be pursu-ed with the seriousness they deserve, at every level of governance and by everyone involved in public-policy making, if we are to produce visible results within the targeted period. As elected representatives of the people, we have an added responsibility to ensure that the targets set out in the MDGs are achieved. For us, essentially, it is about creating the conditions for a dignified human existence by providing for the basic necessities of life for a substantial section of our people.

The Government of India has set out more ambitious goals for poverty reduction than what is envisaged in the MDGs. In the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07), the Government has set out to reduce the poverty ratio by five per cent by 2007 and 15 per cent by 2012. Thus, our Government has set a significantly higher target to reduce poverty ratio to about 11 per cent by 2012 as compared to the MDG target of 18.75 by 2015. Having set these lofty priorities, I am sure, everyone involved will work for achieving them.

* At the Lecture Series for members of Parliament on *India's Challenges to Meet the Millennium Development Goals*, organized by the BPST, New Delhi (3 August 2006).

Prof. Jeffrey Sachs has been an articulate advocate of economic reforms, ɔut with a human face. He has pleaded for what he has described as Enlightened Globalisation', which impels him to suggest that our planners ɜhould lay more emphasis on investment in social sectors such as literacy, ɳealth, education as also basic infrastructure. He has also been forcefully ɑdvocating the need to bridge the gulf between the urban and the rural India. His approach has been to boost public investments in rural areas in ɔrder to ensure that every village in India gets the benefits of basic ɪnfrastructure and social services. I am sure, Prof. Sachs will throw considerable light on the various aspects of the theme. I am confident that all of us here will find the Lecture a rewarding experience. With these words, I welcome Prof. Jeffrey Sachs to make his presentation.

Thank you.

EMPOWERING THE YOUTH: AN UNFINISHED TASK*

I am indeed happy to be here with you this evening and to associate myself with this International Seminar on *Youth and Employment*, organised by the Asia-Pacific Regional Committee of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, a progressive Association representing the youth in different parts of the world. I take this opportunity to heartily compliment the Federation for their untiring efforts towards promoting the welfare of youth across the globe by empowering them educationally, economically, socially and politically.

The youth of a country is, undoubtedly, its most important asset. They represent its strength, vitality and vigour, and are the hope for a nation's future. India with 52 per cent of its population below 25 years of age and 66 per cent below 40 years, is among the world's youngest nations. We have to make the youth educationally sound, socially useful and financially self-dependent, to channelise their potential, energy and enthusiasm into productive ways. But it is a matter of great concern that because of our rate of unemployment, they feel dependent and insecure. It is estimated that more than 500 million youth world-wide today live on less than $2 a day. The condition in the Asia-Pacific region and in Africa is particularly worrisome. It is estimated that more than 70 per cent of the general population in these regions, which is home to the substantial majority of the world population, live on less than $2 a day.

One of the principal causes for mass poverty and poorer quality of living everywhere is large-scale unemployment. As Gurudev Tagore said, 'every child born in this world is born not just with a mouth but with two hands too.' The challenge for the leaders and the policy-makers everywhere is to create appropriate conditions for the effective utilisation of the productive capabilities in every human being. In this context, it is pertinent to mention that an important item in the Millennium Development Goals for the achievement of which the world is striving hard today is to provide decent and productive work to the young people.

* At the inauguration of the International Seminar on *Youth and Employment*, organised by the Asia-Pacific Regional Committee of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, New Delhi (11 September 2006).

Generating employment opportunities and providing work for young people is one of the biggest challenges facing every country – rich or poor, today. There are a large numbers of job seekers competing for limited employment opportunities. Because of the unemployment a significant part of human resources in the world is lying unutilised or under-utilised. The issue, no doubt, is also linked to the rate of growth of population. But fundamentally it is a developmental problem.

The relationship between the education offered to today's youth and the education required in the present day work environment is changing rapidly, particularly in the context of the changes in technology as also due to the emerging areas of specialisation and their linkages with the global economic system. Particular attention has to be paid to formal education and to providing employment. Focus must also be on reducing differences in the quality of education provided to different socio-economic groups.

There is a great disparity between opportunities available to the products of traditional education and those who have access to high quality education relevant to the new economic forces. Only a very small segment of young people enjoy better employment outlook in terms of income, working conditions, social status, mobility, technological competitiveness and job satisfaction. There is also segmentation by gender with young women still continuing to be engaged in comparatively lower-income employment. The rural-urban divide is also quite visible. To break this vicious circle, it is necessary also to provide special job training programmes focussing on specific vulnerabilities, and vocational guidance and placement programmes and that can be done by the State, the private and corporate sectors and the civil society support associations.

The ongoing reforms process throughout the world is further increasing labour flexibility, thereby making the working population more vulnerable to the fast-changing market conditions. Policy-makers need to take appropriate action both in relation to employment policy and also in the regulation of labour markets. The policies relating to public investment, productive innovation and macroeconomic stabilisation need to place greater emphasis on job creation as also on implementing effective vocational training schemes.

The challenge before every Government is not only how to expand job opportunities for young people but also how to bring the new generation into the fold of the production system. What is required is an integrated strategy taking into account both the demand side as well as the supply side of the labour market.

Yet another area requiring special attention is for making provision for support in the form of access to financing and information for young entrepreneurs wishing to establish viable micro-enterprises and small

businesses, as there is now enough scope for a large number of jobs being created in such businesses in different parts of the world.

In India, ever since the initiation of planning in the early fifties, successive Governments at the Centre and in the States have been formulating and implementing several schemes for eradicating unemployment and promoting employment. There have also been legislative initiatives to mitigate the problem of unemployment and to enhance the livelihood security of the poor households particularly in rural areas. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a landmark legislation aimed at productive absorption of under-employed and surplus labour force in the rural sector. The present high rate of youth unemployment in the country, however, needs serious attention by the policy-makers not only to mitigate the frustration faced by the new entrants into the workforce but also to minimise the likely alienation experienced by the youth. Several schemes initiated during the past few decades merit careful scrutiny to assess and evaluate their impact on the youth employment situation in the country. We must not forget that the youth, as a critical national resource, form the core of our future developmental efforts. Let us resolve to work together to empower our youth enabling them to find decent and productive employment, as set out in the Millennium Development Goals.

Needless to say, the political instability and the adverse socio-economic conditions in many developing countries have tremendous impact on the economic growth in general and on employment generation in particular. By developing the mechanisms for improving accountability, by reducing corruption and by broadening the scope for participation of people in decision-making processes, the democratic regimes can be strengthened to further brighten the overall political and socio-economic prospects, thereby creating better conditions of employment for the young population.

The youth of a nation has been rightly described as 'the trustees of posterity'. Only through concerted national endeavours can we effectively harness the full potential of this most important human resource of a nation. It is this realisation that has impelled me to take the initiative for constituting a Parliamentary Forum on Youth. I am sure, it will help in its own ways, in bringing the issues facing the youth among the central concerns of governance in the country. It is imperative for us to have an effective national policy for the full empowerment of our youth. Creating opportunities for gainful employment should be one of the underlying objectives of such a policy.

In this context, I would also like to stress that the youth on their part should shun their apathy to politics and come forward to shoulder their responsibilities as citizens in a democracy. A very proactive involvement in

the political processes is important among them. Rather than contending themselves with pointing out the flaws in our system, they should come forward to take the initiatives for their correction.

For the developing nations, each country has to evolve its own strategy to deal with problems of underdevelopment, unemployment, poverty, etc. Such strategies require us to think beyond providing social safety nets and to focus directly on providing jobs and raising the incomes of the marginalized sections of society. Creating conditions for people's participation in the processes of governance and development is an important first step in this direction. New strategies of development should not be adopted ignoring the interests and concerns of the poor and the marginalised. What is important is to draw up inclusive models.

Many of the larger social problems that the contemporary world is trying to grapple with have their origins in the various kinds of deprivations the youth are experiencing in different degrees in different parts of the world, particularly in regions poorer in education and development and lacking in opportunities for productive engagement. It is, therefore, of vital importance for the world at large to help create conditions for the constructive use of youth energy as agents of change for the modern world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind my young friends assembled here this afternoon that today marks the hundredth Anniversary of the launch of the Satyagraha Movement by Mahatma Gandhi, described by the learned writer Shri P. Sainath, through the *Weapon of Mass Disobedience*, for securing the liberation of millions of people through principled and disciplined efforts by all sections, particularly the youth.

I hope, the issue of youth employment would stimulate meaningful discussion at this Seminar and help us gain new insights into the problem of widespread unemployment being faced by millions of educated young men and women across the world. The deliberations here, I am sure, would throw up new ideas and perspectives on various dimensions of youth unemployment and enable us to arrive at an adequate response to this daunting problem. Before I conclude, I wish the World Federation of Democratic Youth all success in their praiseworthy endeavours towards the promotion of welfare of the youth across the world.

Thank you.

MAINSTREAMING ISSUES CONCERNING SENIOR CITIZENS*

It gives me great pleasure to be here and to associate myself with the function organised by the Help Age India to mark the International Day of Older Persons, the group to which I also belong. It is good that the senior citizens' issues and problems are kept in mind by the society and a special day has been dedicated to them. Ageing is an unavoidable process, which in many cases impairs physical movements but not necessarily mental alertness. The senior citizens ought to be treated as the repositories of experience and also perhaps wisdom. Old age should not necessarily mean forced retirement leading to a state of dependency, and loss of zeal, zest and physical strength. However, to a large number of people, ageing implies physiological and psycho-social changes that are reflected in their reduced income and lesser activities.

The status of the aged persons in contemporary times has changed greatly. Industrialization and urbanization have given rise to migration and the emergence of nuclear families with increasing stress on the aged persons. The rising cost of living and problems of housing, coupled with heightened materialism and at times an intolerant attitude, have added to the problems of the families resulting in the neglect of the elderly. In the recent years, the issues affecting the aged have acquired a new dimension because of the on-going changes in the demographic, social and economic spheres. Older persons today are faced with a number of problems that range from the dilemmas of sufficient income to effective use of free time, social security, acceptance and recognition, social participation and above all, dignity and self-respect. The needs of the elderly are, therefore, not only economic but also socio-psychological in nature.

Even with a comparatively young population, India is poised to become home to the second largest number of older persons in the world. Ageing today is, therefore, a much discussed issue in our country. In 1947, when India attained Independence, the average life span of an Indian was around thirty two years. Today it has gone beyond sixty years with the number of older people steadily rising. In 1991, there were 56 million elderly; and this

* At the function organized by the Help Age India to mark the International Day of Older Persons, New Delhi (1 October 2006).

number rose to 71 million in 2001. Projection studies indicate that the number of people in India over the age of 60 years will increase to 100 million by 2013 and to nearly 200 million by 2030. From these figures, we can infer that in future informal support structures like family will be facing serious challenges of providing economic, health, emotional and physical security to this large segment of our population. These challenges need to be seen in the wake of industrialization and modernization, which have affected the size, the structure and the guiding philosophy of the family. With the weakening of the joint family system, the elders at times face the problem of lack of care, attention and emotional support. The safety and security of elders, especially those living alone, has also become a big challenge in the recent times, particularly in the urban areas.

So far as the economic status of the older persons is concerned, it is perhaps more varied than that of any other age group. For the older persons, retirement has several economic, social and psychological consequences. It not only means the loss of monthly salary but also the loss of work and social relationships which they had been enjoying at the work-place. The plight of the aged in the unorganized sector is without doubt pathetic.

I believe that it will be accepted by all that the older persons are entitled to live in an environment suitable to their needs and if I may say, also self-esteem. A majority of them are willing and capable of continuing to be active and productive, by rendering even voluntary services. Policies are required to empower the older persons in recognition of their contributions to the society. I feel that in this respect the Government should play the central role in formulating and implementing policies that foster such an enabling environment, by engaging the services of the civil society as well. But that does not absolve the civil servants from rendering their duties to the senior citizens on their own.

It is estimated that more than 60 per cent of the older persons in India are below or marginally above the poverty line. At an age when they have meagre resources and higher medical needs, they indeed need financial support. The Government and the civil society should both recognize the care for the aged as one of the primary social objectives. The National Policy for Older Persons announced in 1999 is aimed at the well-being of the aged by giving them their legitimate place in society, to allow them to live with purpose, dignity and peace. The National Council for Older Persons also advises and aids the Government on policies and programmes for the elderly as well as provides feedback on their implementation.

Friends, with proper attitude of respect and care, the older persons can be an asset and a resource that contributes to the development of society. They should be permitted to be full participants in the process of development

and they must also share its benefits. What is needed is to develop a sense of respect and belonging by the younger generation towards the older persons in families and communities. Opportunities should be available to older persons to continue to be productive as long as they want and as long as they are able. One may suggest that self-employment initiatives may be encouraged for older persons for the development of small and micro-enterprises and by ensuring access to credit for them without gender-discrimination.

There is also an urgent need to mainstream the issues concerning the aged and the ageing. It is a matter of great concern that many times older persons are subjected to neglect, abuse and even violence which affects them physically, psychologically, emotionally and financially. The Government, the civil society and voluntary organisations such as the Help Age India need to work together to prevent all kinds of abuse, consumer frauds and crimes against older persons. It should also take the lead in mobilizing the elderly and in articulating their interests and concerns.

Friends, the passing years bring wisdom, but they also bring humility. They perhaps, bring less self assurance, but at the same time they bring a larger sense of the abiding values of life and a deeper sense of commitment to them. Getting on in years has its own set of pleasures. You do not have the stress and tensions related to career, education or jobs. Now is the time to relax and give back to the community your wealth of experience by involving yourself in any activity that interests you. It may be teaching poor children, sharing your knowledge with youngsters and looking after the community work. You must do what you enjoy the most. You can pursue the hobbies for which you never found time till now. The idea is to remain creatively, if not gainfully, involved to lead a more fulfilling life. By thinking positively and by taking care of your health, you can continue to make more contributions to the society at this juncture of your life.

I am very happy to note that the Help Age India, since its very inception, has been tirelessly working for the cause and care of older persons with the ultimate objective of empowering them to take decisions relating to their own lives. The Help Age India has not only been zealously advancing the welfare of the aged but is also espousing their cause by sensitizing the younger generation about the problems of the elderly, especially the needy ones. I am sure that the Help Age India, will continue with its laudable activities to bring a smile on the faces of crores of the elderly people of our country. On the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons, I felicitate our senior citizens and also wish the Help Age India all success in their future endeavours and initiatives. May your example inspire others.

Thank you.

KOZHIKODE: A CONFLUENCE OF HISTORICITY AND MODERNITY*

It is indeed a matter of honour for me to be here and to associate myself with this function, commemorating 140 years of the Civic Body of Kozhikode. I am grateful to the Mayor of Kozhikode to the people's representatives of this great city and to the people of this beautiful region of Kerala, for providing me with this opportunity to associate with this memorable event. I take this opportunity to heartily felicitate all of you and the people of Kozhikode on this significant occasion.

Kozhikode or Calicut, as this city is known the world over, has a fascinating past. Calicut was one of the most important centres of international trade, and the meeting ground of the East and the West. Its streets were conspicuous for the presence of traders and merchants from China and South East Asia brushing shoulders with those from Abyssinia and Europe. History has recorded that in the 14th and 15th centuries, Calicut and Cochin had emerged as the main entry points or ports of entry of trade and commerce in Asia and travellers came to these cities from as far away as Venice, Constantinople, Alexandria, Arabia, Java and China to buy and sell goods. In fact, Kozhikode has been a historic gateway to India. During the course of its eventful history, the city has been visited by many travellers and explorers, including Vasco da Gama, Marco Polo and the Chinese traveller, Cheng Ho.

The advent of the Zamorin dynasty, the unique socio-religious harmony and tolerance experienced during those years, their cultural and other accomplishments and the great deeds of heroes like Kunjali Marakkar, associated with them, are all colourful parts of Calicut's history. However, it was the visit of Vasco da Gama to Calicut in 1498 that changed the very course of Indian history, if not that of the world itself. In the centuries since, Calicut has played a prominent role in Kerala history and Indian history in diverse ways. With its large enterprising population, vibrant civic activities, extensive commercial relations and rich heritage, Kozhikode of those times was a distinctive entity. No wonder then that Calicut was accorded the status of a Municipality as early as in 1866 with an intent to effect better administration and governance.

* At the 140th Anniversary Celebrations of the Kozhikode Civic Body, Kozhikode, Kerala (7 October 2006).

It was also around that time that the national liberation movement began taking a concrete shape all over the country. In the years that followed, Calicut was an important centre of the freedom struggle, drawing people into its fold, irrespective of their religion, caste or gender. I understand that the Beach Road in Calicut, where the Corporation building stands witness to the city's rich past, played host to Mahatma Gandhi where he addressed a meeting on 14 January 1934. I am happy to know that between the old Corporation building and the new building, stands a bust of Gandhiji under a canopy and the road, earlier called the Evans Road, has been renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi Road.

Apart from Gandhiji, national leaders like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and V.K. Krishna Menon, who had his moorings in Calicut, and several others had addressed the people of Kozhikode on this historic beach. It was here in Calicut that Muhamed Abdurahiman Sahib, the distinguished leader of Malabar, offered Salt Satyagraha and suffered at the hands of the police. Calicut was the *Karmabhoomi* of K. Kelappan, reverentially referred to as the Kerala Gandhi. Two of Kerala's greatest gifts to the Left Movement in the country, Comrade EMS and Comrade P. Krishna Pillai plunged themselves into the national movement, at a critical phase in its history, from the soil of Calicut. And so did the inspiring AKG.

Kozhikode has also been a very important centre of literature and literary movement of the State. A number of eminent writers of the State either hail from Kozhikode or have been closely associated with the city in one way or the other. It has also been the land of the nationalist newspaper, *Mathrubhumi* and, of course, its highly accomplished MD, my friend and your representative, Shri M.P. Veerendra Kumar.

The city of Kozhikode in recent times has emerged as an important centre of education and knowledge, attracting talent from all parts of the country. The city has everything to attract tourists as well. The hills, the backwaters and the beach beckon, people from all over the world as they have done all these centuries.

With the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, we have very potent institutional mechanisms to give more meaning and content to the concept of democratic decentralization and participatory governance. If the so-called 'third tier of governance' functions effectively, it is expected that development will be better dispersed and that the arm of Government can reach the needy and impact the people positively. Kerala has been a pioneer of the concept of participatory and sustainable panchayat level development planning and the slogan of 'planning by the people and for the people'. The successful experience of Kerala in these areas is worth emulating. I would suggest that particular emphasis must be laid on infrastructure development,

water supply schemes, solid waste management, public health and sanitation, successful implementation of plan schemes, educational, cultural and social activities, strengthening of the literacy programmes and the library movement.

We are living in a knowledge-driven society wherein the impact of information and communications technology is indeed awesome. This is particularly true of Kerala which has the highest literacy and educational levels in the country as also very high standards of living. The civic authorities, I am sure, are well aware that the expectations of the people are also constantly rising. They demand good governance, accountability and quick response, besides responsiveness, to their needs and aspirations. The right to information regime which we have unleashed entails important responsibilities on the administrative agencies and officials. Increasingly, e-governance has gained acceptance everywhere. I am indeed pleased to see that the Kozhikode Corporation has taken several proactive measures in this regard. I am told that various plans have been proposed for efficacious delivery of governance, with special attention being focused on e-governance. Programmes for computerization in respect of financial matters, property tax, distribution of pension and payment through banks, public grievances redressal, building sanction, annual planning and budgeting system, once implemented, will help in putting in place very people-friendly civic mechanism here. All these are farsighted measures and I heartily compliment the Mayor and his team and the other authorities for their pioneering efforts.

This region, as other parts of the State, have a very high rate of literacy, and a high level of political consciousness. The civility and geniality of the people here are indeed disarming. This is undoubtedly a great asset for a city and the people of Kozhikode can take legitimate pride in this. The blend of tradition and modernity is yet another noticeable aspect of the socio-cultural milieu of Kozhikode and its people. Despite rapid development and modernization, the way the traditions and culture of the people are maintained and cherished in this part of the country is something highly commendable.

Multi-culturalism, communal harmony and religious co-existence are important legacies of this cosmopolitan city. People professing and practising different religions have lived in peace and harmony in the city since ages. It is a city where Hindu, and Jain temples, Christian churches and Muslim mosques have existed in perfect harmony. The instances of aberration to this time-tested reputation, in recent years, is a blot on the history of this great town. I am sure, taking pride in its own glorious history the people will resolve themselves not to repeat such mistakes.

On a personal plane, I am especially delighted to be in Calicut, the 'second Mecca' of Indian football, coming as I do from Kolkata, the 'first Mecca' of Indian football. Passion for football has been a uniting factor for the people

of both these cities. In a way, Kolkata and Kozhikode are twin cities and sister cities and I would indeed be delighted if these two historic cities could work together to promote greater people-to-people contacts, sharing their commonalities and cultural, literary and other heritage. The authorities of the two cities could ponder the possibility of such interaction between Kolkata and Kozhikode. I am told that this city is in great love with the Bengali literature. It is a tribute to the great creative minds of Bengal as also to the literary tradition of this city.

With these words, I once again thank you all for having associated me with the 140th anniversary celebrations of the Kozhikode Civic Body and felicitate all of you on this historic occasion. I am sure that this great city will continue to beckon people from across the world to visit its shores and savour its legendary hospitality, civilizational heritage and hoary history.

Thank you.

MONITORING THE MDGs: A PARLIAMENTARY PERSPECTIVE*

The Millennium Development Goals delineate a roadmap to address the critical developmental challenges before the global community. The MDGs' primary focus is on poverty eradication, as also areas ranging from universalisation of education, better health care and environmental sustainability to enabling a global partnership for development. The MDGs that way envisage a comprehensive vision of development.

As far as poverty reduction is concerned, many countries are showing varying degrees of improvement in the quality of life while some others seem to lag behind. Countries must share their experiences and learn from successful experiments in poverty reduction. The developing countries, many of whom are already reeling under resource constraints and external debt, would need external assistance to fulfil their commitments under the MDGs, especially in relation to poverty reduction.

The debt burden is clearly a major constraint to achieve the MDGs and to eradicate poverty. It is imperative that the developed countries fulfil their commitment of 0.7 per cent of GNP as ODA to developing countries. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative are not a panacea in itself, for even if all debts of the poor countries are cancelled, most would still continue to depend on significant levels of concessional external assistance. Hence, alongside debt relief, debt sustainability needs to be given serious consideration. We welcome the start of the implementation of the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) and hope that the donors, especially G-8's political intentions will be converted into unqualified commitment.

An important issue in the development dialogue is governance and corruption. We would like to urge that we adopt a development-centric approach to the issue and encourage the spirit of mutual responsibility in dealing with governance among all development partners, namely the developing countries, developed countries and multilateral institutions. While

* At the 115th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly on *The Role of Parliaments in Overseeing the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals Relating to the Problem of Debt and Eradication of Poverty and Corruption*, Geneva (16 October 2006).

issues of governance and corruption are certainly critical, they should not become central to the development debate. They are no substitute for tackling the real issues of achieving the MDGs.

India has made sustained achievements with regard to all the MDGs. Poverty ratio is on a continuous declining trend and we are confident that we can reach the target of halving it before 2015. Indeed, we have set a significantly more ambitious target to reduce the poverty ratio to about 11 per cent by 2012. Under a parliamentary initiative, we have passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, guaranteeing at least 100 days of employment to any adult member in a rural household in a financial year. Parliamentarians have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that the MDGs are achieved within the specified targets. This is particularly so in the case of eradicating poverty, addressing the problem of debt and combating corruption. In effectively overseeing the programmes and policies relating to MDGs, they must make the optimum use of various procedural devices towards ensuring accountability, transparency and good governance.

Thank you.

INDIA'S STATUS IN A FREE WORLD ECONOMY*

I feel greatly honoured to have been invited to deliver this Lecture organised in the memory of Late Prof. Madhu Dandavate, one of the most illustrious leaders of our times, a fine human being, a crusading leader of the masses and a champion of the deprived and the destitute. I pay my respectful homage to his memory and compliment the Socialist Front for organizing this programme.

It is not given to many to come to associate with diverse fields of activities ranging from the world of learning to high positions in Government and leave a distinct mark on all of them as did Prof. Madhu Dandavate. A veteran socialist leader, Prof. Dandavate was one of the towering figures of post-Independence public life in the country and a great moral force in our political firmament. He was an erudite scholar, a committed Gandhian, an outstanding parliamentarian, an able administrator, a champion of the working class and an eloquent articulator of larger national causes. A true patriot and a nationalist to the core, Prof. Dandavate involved himself passionately with all the major progressive people's movements of his time, starting with the freedom movement, then in the movement to liberate Goa from the Portuguese rule, and in the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, and later stood out among the national leadership, defending democracy and other finer values in our national life.

Simplicity and humility were Prof. Dandavate's hallmarks, both when he occupied high positions in the Government as also when he lived the life of a common man, without the trappings of official positions. Known for his erudition and high thinking, he was a symbol of transparent honesty and unquestionable integrity. Endowed with an enormous sense of history and native wisdom, Prof. Dandavate would raise his voice against injustices of all kinds. He represented the best in our traditions and was also an outspoken critic of obscurantism, casteism and fundamentalism. There was no major social issue of his time with which he was not associated and there was no larger national cause that he would not promote with passion.

Prof. Dandavate was indeed an outstanding public figure, a sensitive human being and a leader of unimpeachable integrity. A parliamentarian of

* At the Lecture to mark the First Death Anniversary of Prof. Madhu Dandavate on *India's Status in a Free World Economy*, Mumbai (18 November 2006).

exceptional brilliance, Prof. Dandavate greatly enriched our public life, both inside and outside the Parliament. His thought provoking, analytical and scintillating speeches on subjects of immense social relevance were greatly inspiring. His knowledge of the rules and parliamentary procedure was highly commendable. His was one of the most powerful and progressive voices in Parliament and outside of its portals in defence of democracy, socialism and secularism. An embodiment of gentleness, incisive intellect, humanism and compassion, Prof. Dandavate is a role model for all of us in public life.

Prof. Dandavate's administrative capabilities were amply proved when he headed the crucial Ministries of Railways and Finance in the Union Government. His sound understanding of economic and fiscal issues stood him in good stead when he served the country as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission. As a fitting tribute to his memory, I deem it appropriate to speak today on *India's Status in a Free World Economy*, a subject of great contemporary relevance, as we are grappling with the challenges and opportunities offered by the fast-changing global economic order.

Friends, what is referred to as global economic integration has contributed to the emergence of a world economy which may not have become totally free, but the trends towards globalisation have begun in more ways than one. India has made significant strides in integrating itself into the global economy, which requires that every effort should be made to put our national interests and native realities on a firm basis. A decade and a half ago, the prospect of India becoming a major player in the global economy seemed a distant dream. During the last fifteen years, however, there has been a considerable change not only in the world's perception about India's future, but also in our own perception about our own capabilities and achievements. Today, the world has acknowledged India in a large measure, as a significant player in the world economy.

Prof. Dandavate's approach to free economy was cautious, as he was always in favour of ensuring India's economic sovereignty. He argued forcefully that 'very often, economic freedom is more significant than political freedom.' He, however, believed that 'in building our economy, we must discard dogmatism of the extreme kind'. He was open to the idea of external assistance as long as it did not infringe on our sovereignty. He was worried about the growing fiscal deficit but wanted the external aid to be utilised for productive purposes rather than to reduce the fiscal deficit, and thereby getting entangled in the vicious cycle of debt trap. A firm believer in 'growth with social justice', he always stressed the need to pay due attention to agriculture and small-scale industries which significantly contribute to our GDP as well as to the generation of employment. But his dream of seeing poverty eradicated from the Indian soil still remains unfulfilled. It still remains as one of the major challenges of free India.

There is no denying the fact that today we can look back with pride at some of our achievements as an independent nation. Having successfully reversed the worst inequalities of our colonial heritage, we have built India into a nation of considerable economic strength within the framework of democracy with full regard for human rights and the Rule of Law. In the economic sphere, our challenge is to keep pace with rapid and sweeping global changes accommodating the interests of our people. While we have to be sensitive to the problems within the country, the way we deal with them has to be consistent with the realisation of the immense potential of carving out a special place for our country in the international arena of competitiveness.

To begin with, it was in response to the fiscal and balance of payments crises in the early 1990s that India embarked on a programme of economic policy reforms consisting of stabilisation-cum-structural adjustment measures to attain macro-economic stability and higher rates of economic growth. Five different Governments have been in office since the reforms process was initiated. Evidently, India's political system has been able to arrive at some degree of consensus about the basic directions of economic reforms being pursued in the country. Political parties may have different perceptions about the content and contours of these reforms but there is a larger consensus that our national interests cannot be compromised at any cost. In fact, the experience of coalition governance has imparted a certain degree of stability and consistency in the country's economic policy-making.

Since the economic reforms were initiated, the Indian economy has registered an annual average growth rate of over 6 per cent. Gradually, India is becoming a production base and an export hub for diverse goods, from agricultural products to automobile components to high-end services. Indian firms are now part of the global production chain. Taking advantage of its pool of high-quality scientific talent, international corporations have established large R&D centres in India operating through satellite links. Indian programmers are providing IT support to a large number of foreign firms in areas ranging from software development and maintenance, data transcription and transmission to telemarketing. Indian IT industry has proven particularly dynamic and is now of global repute and its success goes to show that India is perfectly capable of competing and succeeding at the international level. All these strengths have resulted in a greater integration of the Indian economy with the world economy.

Economic development in the recent years indicate a growing resilience and vitality of our economy increasing the competitiveness of the Indian industry which is reflected in the robust merchandise export growth. Concomitantly, the services sector today contributes more than one-half of

our GDP, with growing contribution from areas such as the information technology, telecommunications, transport and tourism. For three years running, the rate of growth of our economy has been quite impressive. The GDP growth rate is estimated at between 7.5 and 8.5 per cent in the years 2003-04 to 2005-06. While these figures conceal sectoral differences, such as the poor performance of agriculture and the disproportionately high rate of growth of services, they are indeed appreciable, especially because we have not returned to the years of high inflation. There is also a sea change in India's status in the world economy, both in terms of actual figures and in terms of international perceptions of our role in the global economy.

The Indian economy is the fourth largest in the world today. But the various socio-economic indicators reveal that our growth pattern is not uniform for all the sectors of our economy. While the rate of growth for manufacturing, services and communications sectors has generally improved, in the vital sectors like agriculture, infrastructure development, community and social services our performance is not appreciable. The regional and other dimensions of inequality have also widened over the past few years. The high aggregate rate of growth masks substantial differentials in performance across sectors. In fact, both the primary and some secondary and tertiary sectors have experienced deceleration of growth along with much greater volatility of growth. The sharpest deceleration of growth was in agriculture.

The policy of liberalisation and globalisation does not seem to have absorbed the problems and potentials of the agricultural sector. Prof. Dandavate had rightly cautioned us about the impact of globalisation on the agriculture and allied sectors of our economy. As he observed:

> Agriculture is the base of our nation's economy. It provides more than 30% of the gross domestic product and 65% of employment in the country. An assault on such a rich sector is an attack on our economic freedom. In most of the rich, developed countries, high export subsidies are provided to agriculturists so that they can export their products at cheaper rates to countries like India. As a result, farmers here suffer. Their economic freedom to build an agricultural economy suffers due to competition from cheap imported commodities. If they reduce their product prices to face this competition, they are unable to provide adequate wages to agricultural labour. This leads to more agriculturists and agricultural labour sinking below the poverty line. Their economic freedom to improve their living standards is thus endangered.

Elsewhere, he had observed, 'As a consequence of WTO regulations, there is an inflow of cheap agricultural products into the Indian market. These products destroy the markets of agriculturists in India leading to deprivation of opportunities for livelihood. If this sector is destroyed, it will destroy the economy of the country, leading to the spread of poverty.'

In these days, when we understand the gravity of the problems faced by the farming sector across the country, Prof. Dandavate's warnings seem very much prophetic. Unquestionably, agriculture in India has tremendous potential to bring about prosperity to our people. It also has the largest potential for increasing employment in some of the poorest regions of our country.

It is, however, widely acknowledged that currently rural India is in the midst of a crisis, expressed in growing numbers of farmers' suicides, deaths due to starvation and forced migration for survival. Eminent agricultural scientists and economists have recognised that the crisis on the agricultural front is not unrelated to India's growing global integration. As has been acknowledged by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, the distinguished agricultural economist:

> The agrarian crisis has its roots in the collapse of the rural economy.... Unemployment leading to out-migration of the assetless is growing. The minimum support price mechanism is not operating for most commodities. At every level of the livelihood security system, there is a tendency to make profit out of poverty. Something is terribly wrong in the countryside... .

Theoretically, a free world economy would connote that we leave development to a market process where resources will be allocated efficiently, and Government would only provide the enabling environment. Economic policies that support this thought process call for greater liberalization, completely open economic borders, free multilateral trade, flexibility in employment, and the possibility of foreign direct investment in all economic activities. However, when we look at ground realities, I find it difficult to identify nations which truly follow such a free market economy to relative perfection. Almost all developed nations follow some form of protectionist policies or the other. Can we export agricultural products or textiles to most of the developed parts of the world, even if our products are of the highest quality ? WTO has faltered on fair multilateral trade due to the rigid postures taken by many developed countries on the issue of agriculture. Similarly, for many products, borders may be open, but distribution channels are heavily guarded to dissuade entry from other nations.

A free world economy does not necessarily ensure development with equity. Therefore, for a country like India, we need to pursue policies that will not only enhance our economic competitiveness but ensure social

development as well. We cannot afford to ignore two-thirds of our population, who not only form the basis of the Indian market and the skill sets, but the rural backbone of the country. By all means we must respond to the change that globalization unleashes. We must look at economic reforms and liberalization as something that has the potential to unlock the fetters to growth. But we must respond in a way that ensures that growth and development can be more inclusive, equitable and just.

There has been considerable debate in India about the relevance and utility of the ongoing process of globalisation. While some have vigorously protested against the process of globalisation, some others have regarded it as a panacea for all the world problems and as the key to prosperity and well-being for all the countries and all the people. As Prof. Madhu Dandavate once said: 'One need not be dogmatic about the perspective to build our economy. But, we must not be the victims of the concept that to develop the economy of an under-developed country like ours, a new economic policy based on globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation is the only viable alternative.' As an independent nation State, our job is to ensure that we maximize the advantages for our country and minimize the risks.

No doubt, the development of the economy has to be consistent with our national interests. It is important to increase investment in the physical and social infrastructure. It is difficult to achieve growth and gain a long-term competitive strength without substantial improvement in the infrastructure sector. Sustainable economic growth is intrinsically linked to the productive efficiency of the labour force. We are one of the youngest nations in the world today. Fifty-five per cent of our people is below the age of 25. If this valuable asset is properly fed, nurtured, educated and remain healthy our country will come to occupy a very prominent place in the comity of nations. We need to empower our young population, train them and educate them, so that they can become more capable of handling the challenges that global India has to meet.

In this context, an important dimension in which India's status in a free world economy needs to be evaluated relates to poverty reduction which has long been recognised as a core objective of our planning. The view is often expressed, both internationally and in India, that liberalisation and globalisation have done little for the poor and may even have made things worse for them. Going by the facts, poverty is structural in nature with its roots in the economic and political conditions of our country. If economic nationalism is to be translated into practical goals, economic development in the sense of rise in GNP and per capita income is by itself not of much significance, unless the removal of poverty, unemployment and underemployment is undertaken on a war-footing. Employment has to be

treated as the central objective of growth in India. It has to be acknowledged that it is not a mere corollary of growth. In this respect, one would watch with great interest the result of a landmark legislation — the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 — which seek to address primarily the rural joblessness by providing guaranteed employment for at least 100 days in a year to the unemployed, apart from the other measures undertaken by the Governments — both at the Centre and the States.

The opening up of the Indian economy in the process of globalization was primarily visualised as a mechanism where trade would function as an 'engine of growth' and the fruits of growth would trickle down to the poor. However, the results have been mixed. Although the poverty ratio has declined since the onset of liberalisation of the economy, the number of people below poverty line still remains high, with wide variations across States. As the eminent columnist, P. Sainath, claims: 'Our growth rate is the envy of many.... But the rate of decline of child deaths declined in the 1990s. ... And India may have emerged the 15th biggest donor to the World Food Programme last year. But since the time we began that journey, we also added more newly hungry people than the rest of the world put together. It even saw a period when hunger rose in India and fell in Ethiopia... . The number of farm households in debt has nearly doubled in the years of the 'reforms'... .There is pride in the press over the rise of 'medical tourism'. But more than a fifth of our own people no longer seek health care of any kind. They just can't afford it. ...'

Today, it is certainly not a secret that the 8 per cent GDP growth is not visible to many in the country. The beneficiaries of globalization are still limited. While globalization may seem unavoidable and perhaps we cannot ultimately avoid integrating with the world economy, we must pay heed to the aspirations of India's masses. For many, the aspirations are limited to getting employment and to attaining reasonable wages, shelter, drinking water, electricity, schools, hospitals and connectivity. These modest aspirations will have to be met together with our larger aspirations to create world class companies and institutions.

The views expressed by one of our leading industrialists are reflective of the desire and demand of the business community in the country today: 'This is the time for India to shift gears and for our leaders to view India in the global context — competing and excelling in the global arena. We can no longer compare ourselves with our own past history nor be satisfied with growth and improvement in small increments.'

It is also for those representing the industry today to ask themselves as to how can the benefits of this new policy framework for large-scale 'growth

and improvement' be taken to the people at large ? How can they contribute to addressing the problems of the agricultural sector, of rural poverty, of our health-care sector, of rural infrastructure, of energy scarcity, of education, and several others ? While recognising that it is important for the overall growth of the country, to grab the opportunities offered by the new economic forces, it is equally important to bear in mind that the vast majority of our people still need the caring eye of the Government and of everyone else capable of contributing to their uplift, to bring themselves to a level where their preferences, their quality of existence also can match the global standards. Our policy-makers are, no doubt, mindful of their problems, their aspirations and of the fact that the achievements are not yet adequate. As the distinguished statesman K.R. Narayanan said: 'We cannot empower people unless we address the issues concerning equality and equality of opportunities for the vast masses of people who have to struggle for their daily existence. Empowerment means uplifting the unprivileged and making them partners and beneficiaries of nation building activities.'

Growth in our liberalising and globalising economy must, therefore, lead to a better quality of life for the poor. As Professor Amartya Sen, while talking of globalization and poverty has rightly said:

> We cannot reverse the economic predicament of the poor across the world by withholding from them the great advantages of contemporary technology, the well-established efficiency of international trade and exchange, and the social as well as economic merits of living in an open society. Rather, the main issue is how to make good use of the remarkable benefits of economic intercourse and technological progress in a way that pays adequate attention to the interests of the deprived and the underdog ... the real issue is the distribution of globalization's benefits ... The central issue of contention is not globalization itself, nor is it the use of the market as an institution, but the iniquity in the overall balance of institutional arrangements which produces very unequal sharing of the benefits of globalization. The question is not just whether the poor, too, gain something from globalization, but whether they get a fair share and a fair opportunity.

We have to strive for growth with a human face that is socially equitable and regionally balanced, where all the sectors and the entire population partake of the fruits of our burgeoning economy. We need to look at future progress with a new concept of 'Gross National Entitlement' in our country where our people, specially those belonging to the vulnerable sections of the community, will be entitled to earn their living, to have education, the right to access quality healthcare, to obtain basic needs such as food, shelter,

clothing, drinking water and indeed will be entitled to and actually have the freedom to live in dignity, instead of being forced to accept what is being doled out by the system.

If we have to earn the distinction of being a 'global India', then it is time that we launch a national concerted effort to ensure the enjoyment by all sections of the people of what their entitlements are, as provided by our Constitution as their Fundamental Rights and as per the Directive Principles of State Policy which visualizes a welfare State for our country. The people have the inalienable right to enjoy the basic freedoms, which are an integral part of life of the citizens in any developed country as also their entitlements as citizens in a democracy. Nothing more calls for a greater fervour than the desire and need to provide one billion Indians with the freedom to engage in a productive life and gain the consequent rewards, not only as an individual but also for the society and the nation. Prof. Dandavate himself had always been in favour of a growth strategy that brings about equity and justice in the society. He once said: 'I believe in a pattern of economy in which economic and political models will sub-serve the interest of the process of devolution of power and decentralization of economy which, in turn, will sub-serve the aims of economic equality and social justice'.

Friends, we are living in fast changing times. Our country is undergoing a rapid and increasingly all encompassing process of socio-economic transformation. With a billion-strong people developing at its current pace, we are today one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Working on the frontiers of scientific, technological and managerial knowledge, we must prepare ourselves for addressing the challenges of the evolving world economy. Given the young age profile of our population and the inherent creativity, dynamism and entrepreneurial skills of our people, I am confident that we will sustain ourselves as a globally competitive economy in the times to come.

Prof. Madhu Dandavate once observed: 'A nation's freedom is not only political. It has to be complemented by economic freedom. In the absence of economic freedom, the integrated picture of India's economy remains blurred and incomplete. That, indeed, is the tragedy of India today.' If we have to correct the present imbalances in our economic and financial architecture, especially in the context of a free world economy, it is imperative that we heed the sane counsel of perceptive leaders like Prof. Madhu Dandavate.

Many leaders and activists have pertinently expressed their concern about our sovereignty being infringed due to interventions from the international financial and monetary institutions while pursuing the reform process in our economy. Certainly, we cannot allow our development agenda to be surrendered at the hands of multilateral institutions. We have to address all

our developmental challenges within the framework of our economic and financial sovereignty and our domestic realities, remaining sensitive to the developments taking place around us. As has been observed by Prof. Chandrasekhar: 'No country can be insular. Some degree of engagement and integration with the world economy is inevitable. But the strength of our economy would depend on the ability to manage that process of integration so that we do not traverse a trajectory that increasingly compromise our national sovereignty and undermine our ability of dealing with pressing problems like agrarian distress, persisting poverty and deprivation, and unemployment and underemployment.'

It is time that we, as an enlightened nation, take on the challenge to raise the developmental milestone to a completely new and higher level. Socio-economic uplift of India's masses is not an issue only of political ideology or political rhetoric. It is in our enlightened self-interest that we must seriously look at the issue of social and economic development and prosperity of India's economically disadvantaged sections. Unless the economic conditions, educational levels and quality of life of this large segment of our population are enhanced, economic growth will also be limited by the constraints of a low purchasing power and fragmented markets. A prosperous nation will create more opportunities than one where a majority of the people are under serious consumption constraints. This obligation should not be treated as a matter of philanthropy or charity, but as an issue of national responsibility.

It is, therefore, imperative that the developmental path that we are adopting results in removing the distress of the common people, in raising the incomes and improving the livelihood of the workers, in providing good health-care services, in substantially minimizing the debt burden on the poor and in reducing, if not removing, the divide between the rich and the poor. I once again thank the Socialist Front for according me this opportunity to share with this august audience my views and anxieties over India's status in a free world economy. I wish them all success in their laudable endeavours towards the furtherance of the ideals and values that Prof. Madhu Dandavate upheld all through his public life.

Thank you.

COMBATING THE GLOBAL THREAT OF HIV/AIDS*

We have gathered here this morning to signal the nation's unwavering commitment to confront the problem of HIV/AIDS which has assumed alarming proportions around the world today posing one of the greatest public health challenges of our times. Unfortunately, of the estimated 40 million victims worldwide, 95 per cent live in the developing world. Considering the magnitude of the problem, drafting and implementing an AIDS Control Programme is undoubtedly a stupendous task before the national leadership today. It is not merely a medical challenge, it has serious social, economic, political and legal ramifications.

One of the biggest hurdles in the way of the AIDS Control Programmes is the social stigma and discrimination faced by those who are infected and also by those who are closely associated with them. Many HIV infected people suffer from violation of their basic right of access to treatment and care. Among the victims, women and children are the worst sufferers. They experience acute economic hardships, psychological distress, social ostracism, loss of inheritance and undergo severe physiological and social trauma. That being so, more focussed attention need to be paid to women and children affected by AIDS. It is also important to address the related issues like poverty, illiteracy and the deficiencies in the health services in the country.

However, it is heartening that sustained efforts on our part have produced encouraging results. The Government's multi-sectoral strategy for the prevention and control of AIDS, being implemented through the National AIDS Control Organisation and the State AIDS Cells/Societies, has been a praiseworthy initiative.

We, Parliamentarians, can also play a vital role in this task by, amongst others, influencing public opinion, enhancing awareness of relevant issues and thereby helping in dispelling the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS and in mobilizing the agencies of the Government, private sector and civil society groups in dealing with the crisis. Parliamentarians should also seek to ensure formulation of policies and programmes that are sensitive to the needs of those suffering from HIV/AIDS and assist in the proper implementation of

* At the function to mark the World AIDS Day, organized by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Parliamentarians' Forum on HIV/AIDS, New Delhi (1 December 2006).

these programmes and for raising resources to support and enhance effective HIV/AIDS control programmes.

The Parliament of India had hosted a CPA Study Group last year on the *Role of Parliamentarians in combating the HIV/AIDS Pandemic*. The Study Group presented its Report indicating ways in which members of Parliament can play their role in combating the problem and for developing strategies to deal with it. As the Study Group Report pointed out, no country, developed or developing, can ignore the effects of HIV/AIDS on the global economy and society.

Considering the gravity of the problem in our country, there is an urgent need to intensify efforts to prevent the spread of the disease as also to sustain the progress achieved in combating it. A problem of such serious proportions can only be tackled successfully with the active involvement of the governmental agencies, the elected representatives, the media, the educational institutions, the civil society groups, and the people at large. I take this opportunity to compliment the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Parliamentarians' Forum for all their endeavours to confront the threat posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for our people. This assembly of our national leadership at the highest level confirms our commitment to combat the problem facing the nation.

Thank you.

HEALTHY WOMEN, WEALTHY NATION*

I am thankful to the Organising Committee for their invitation to me to be amidst you today at the Inaugural Function of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the All India Congress of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (AICOG). At the outset, I would like to congratulate Dr. Gita Ganguly Mukherjee, Organizing Chairperson, AICOG 2007, and her colleagues in the Committee and all office bearers and members of the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India, on this momentous occasion for your fraternity.

I am indeed pleased to learn that the Federation, comprising about 21,000 Gynaecologists from all over the country and 184 Societies in the field from different States of India, has been rendering commendable service to uphold and uplift the health profile of the women in our country — physically, physiologically and psychologically, in a holistic manner. I am especially happy to learn that over the years, it has emerged as an outstanding platform where obstetricians and Gynaecologists from different parts of the country assemble under a single umbrella, to present, discuss and exchange views on different aspects of Women's health, such as contraception, reproductive health, abortion, female foeticide, emerging techniques and treatment modalities in the field, among others, which impinge on the health and well-being of our nation, and of our women and children in particular.

I understand that around 10,000 participants from India and abroad are attending this All India Congress, the motto of which, quite rightly, is 'Healthy Women, Wealthy Nation'. I gather that the themes of the Conference include important issues such as the population crisis and related medical practices, abnormal labour, maternal mortality and maternal morbidity. These are critical areas for the well-being of our women and children, and as such, key elements in health care. I trust, the delegates will get to share their experiences and expertise with regard to various practices and emerging developments in the crucial fields of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and help in creating awareness about these important components of maternal and child health and women's empowerment in general.

* At the inauguration of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the All India Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Kolkata (6 January 2007).

Friends, among the diverse disciplines of medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology occupy a distinctive place, as the specialists in these areas cater to the well-being of the mother and that of the child. The right to being born and once born, the right to life of a child is secured through the skilled and caring hands of the obstetricians and gynaecologists. As such, your fraternity has a pivotal role in guaranteeing the constitutional directive of right to equality and right to life, including the right to health of vast sections of our population. After having served for fifty years the cause of the two most vulnerable segments of our society — child and mother — and thereby having pushed their health concerns high on the national agenda, it is natural for a professional event like this Congress to introspect and evaluate its contributions towards national reconstruction. It should certainly be a proud moment for the delegates as also for the members of the Federation to recall various initiatives taken at their earlier meetings to address the issues of family healthcare, emergency obstetrics services, campaign against female foeticide and the occurrence of HIV/AIDS, among others. But, it is also an occasion to look at those areas that need our immediate attention and to devise innovative ways and means that could provide us with the requisite insight and determination to withstand various challenges towards creating an empowering and enabling environment for women's unimpeded access to affordable health services. It is against this backdrop that this Congress assumes added significance.

Friends, women constitute nearly half of our population and that being so, it is imperative that we accord the highest priority to their health; after all, the health of our women will determine the overall health of our nation. Regretably, health care of the girl child and our women is found to be attracting less attention when compared to their male counterparts. This is particularly so in the case of the rural areas where health care infrastructure is certainly not up to the desired standards aggravated by gender bias against women. In many cases, neglect starts even at adolescence and girls grow up in poverty, malnourished, anaemic and uneducated about the very factors that promote health care and hygiene. An anaemic and malnourished young woman, and consequently the new born, naturally will have to suffer severe physical trauma at the time of pregnancy and delivery. Unwanted pregnancies are another serious problem, along with sexually transmitted diseases and, of late, situations involving HIV/AIDS, female foeticide and female infanticide are grave problems that our society is today confronting. The increasing number of 'missing girl children' are a blot on the collective consciousness of our society.

It is an undeniable fact that there exists a wide gap between our challenges in the health sector, the goals to be achieved and the actual achievements. This is where we need to introspect on the role and commitment of health

administrators and the professionals in the field. While we talk of the need of better nutrition and sound health services for them, it is a matter of deep concern that over 1,00,000 women still die of pregnancy related complications every year. One maternal death is reported every six minutes and the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) varies between 200 and 800 per 100,000 live births. Ante-natal and post-natal care facilities are not easily available in many villages and rural areas. Within the country, there are widespread variations among our States in all these matters which also warrant focused attention.

We should try to find the reasons behind this sorry state of affairs while we strive hard to join the developed nations in terms of economic progress and human development. India is one of the few countries where men and women have nearly the same life expectancy at birth. However, the life expectancy of adult women is not at par with that of men and this is often attributed to their high mortality during childhood and the reproductive years. According to experts, women and girls are more vulnerable than men and boys to reproductive infections. It is also ascertained that MMR is higher in teenaged women or those above the age of 35 years. The problem is further exacerbated when they are left with insufficient access to nutritious food and healthcare. It is also a fact that women, who bear most of the medical, emotional and social burdens and risks of contraception, pregnancy, abortion, delivery and care of children have to face various hurdles to exercise their right to life. In this context, it is certainly an irony that though most of them have to shoulder a triple workload in the form of productive work, household maintenance and childbearing, the care they receive in terms of nutrition and education is grossly inadequate.

We must ponder how we can ensure that women grow and remain healthy and live a disease-free and dignified life. No doubt, the reduction in the national rate of IMR and MMR, which are sensitive indicators of human development, should be the priority area. While the MMR has indeed declined over the years, the rate of decline is not commensurate with the advances in medical care. If we have to achieve the target of a three-fourth reduction in MMR by the year 2015, as envisaged under the Millennium Development Goals, we have to ensure a drastic rate of decline for which appropriate measures should be taken by all concerned. For this to happen, women should have sufficient and easy access to comprehensive, affordable and quality healthcare. Moreover, we must try to put in place both societal and legal safeguards to enable women to exercise effectively their reproductive rights to help them make informed choices, thereby reducing the risk of sexual and other health risks.

We must not overlook the fact that the low socio-economic status of a large number of women, more specifically their inability to avail of the benefits

of the latest health services due to poverty, is one of the biggest hurdles that needs to be addressed. Health care facilities available across the country are not adequate to attend to the problem areas in an effective manner. The incidence of maternal and child mortality is much more in the rural areas than in the urban centres. Poor pre-natal care for pregnant women and inadequate infrastructure, coupled with the poor economic conditions of the rural people, lead to very unsatisfactory maternal care in the villages where a substantial chunk of our people lives. As several agencies have found the common causes of maternal mortality to be anaemia, haemorrhage, sepsis and abortion, all of which, I would say, would be much more pronounced among the rural poor. Because of lack of knowledge and education among them, often the rural poor do not even realize that such complications can lead to death, if not attended on an emergent basis. Very often, they depend on untrained and even unqualified individuals for their health-related problems. That makes it all the more important that health infrastructure is improved in the rural areas and that community awareness is generated about maternal health. Therein lies the importance of affordable and modern obstetric care facilities all over the country, especially in our villages and far flung areas.

It is, therefore, necessary that we recondition and reorient our health services in such a way that their benefits reach the poorer segments of our population. In this regard, though we may take satisfaction from the fact that our rural primary health infrastructure has recorded an impressive growth after Independence, it is certainly a cause of concern that only 20 per cent services in the field of healthcare are being provided by the public health sector. If we have to address the problems faced by women, particularly those belonging to the poorer sections, the investment in public health infrastructure needs to be substantially augmented.

Another priority area where we need to work hard is to customize the benefits of the rapidly changing medical technologies as per the needs and economic capabilities of the less-privileged women, particularly those in rural areas. We all know, various technological changes are reshaping our health services at a very fast pace. You will agree that unless we identify the worth of these technologies in creating a disease-free society at all levels, irrespective of gender, economic and social differentials, it will be difficult for us to achieve our national objective to provide to women in general a level-playing field. After all, women's health can have a decisive impact on the contribution that they can make to national development. It is not merely a matter of well-being of women; it is also a matter of education and health care and eventually their empowerment, which will enable them to make informed choices in their lives. Today's women should have the power to decide individual reproductive choices as also in taking decisions which impinge on

their health and development. The solution lies in their empowerment through education and health care so that they can realize their rights and responsibilities and contribute as proactive and equal citizens towards national weal.

The fraternity of obstetricians and gynaecologists have a great responsibility in such a scenario. In this context, the goals of AICOG 2007, which set the targets to bring pertinent health issues to the forefront like laying guidelines and influencing policy-makers, spreading expertise and knowledge and fostering partnership and uniting the fraternity, assumes special importance. These are certainly laudable goals, which need to be secured in letter and spirit. I once again congratulate all the members of the federation and all other delegates on the Golden Jubilee of the All India Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. I am confident that the proceedings of the Congress will lead to a better understanding of issues linked to child care and safe motherhood. More importantly, I trust that the delegates will share their views and expertise on the need to broadbase their strategies so that the benefits of healthcare strategies could reach all women, especially those who stand on the periphery of progress and development, and lead to their efficacious empowerment.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the All India Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Thank you.

SANSKRIT: THE NEED TO PRESERVE OUR RICH HERITAGE*

It gives me great pleasure to be here today at the Presentation Ceremony of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia Shreevani Alankaran for 2005 and 2006, being one of the most prestigious awards conferred for excellence in Sanskrit language and literature. I heartily felicitate Swami Rambhadracharya and Prof. Hari Narayan Dixit who have been conferred this rare honour. I also take this opportunity to compliment the Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia Shreevani Nyas, which, ever since its inception, has been contributing significantly to the development and promotion of Sanskrit language and literature.

Late Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia was a multi-faceted personality who strengthened our national fabric by his manifold contributions. The Dalmia industrial complexes are a living testimony to the entrepreneurial skills of the Dalmia family. Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmiaji was not content with creating wealth but wanted to make a difference to the lives of the people of the country. His philanthropic contributions were legendary and many have benefited from the charities he set up. More than anything else, Dalmiaji took great pride in Indian culture, traditions and heritage. The promotion of Sanskrit language and literature was one of his prime concerns. As such, it is only appropriate that the Shreevani Alankaran is named after the Late Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia. I take this opportunity to pay my tributes to his memory.

Maha Mahopadhyaya Swami Rambhadracharya, whose epic Sanskrit work Shri Bhargawaraghawiyam has been chosen for the Award for the year 2005, is a celebrated Sanskrit scholar and educationist of great merit and achievement. In spite of his loss of vision at a tender age, Swamiji overcame all hurdles in his way in the pursuit of knowledge. His academic accomplishments are many and several prestigious Universities have conferred their honorary degrees on him. A polyglot, he has composed poems in many Indian languages. He has also authored about 75 books on diverse themes having a bearing on our culture, heritage, traditions and philosophy which

* At the Presentation Ceremony of the *Twelfth and Thirteenth Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia Shreevani Alankaran*, 2005-2006, New Delhi (18 January 2007).

have received appreciation. A builder of several institutions, he started the Vikalanga Vishwavidyalaya at Chitrakoot, of which he is the lifelong Chancellor. By conferring the Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia Shreevani Alankaran 2005 on Swami Rambhadracharya, the Nyas has indeed enhanced the prestige of the Award.

Prof. Hari Narayan Dixit who has received the Award for the year 2006 is another eminent Sanskrit scholar who has enriched the language and literature by his contributions and commitment. A devoted scholar and teacher, Prof. Dixit has spent a life time for the promotion of Sanskrit. I understand that he guided many research studies in Sanskrit and 55 scholars took their doctoral degree under his guidance and supervision. Prof. Dixit has authored many Sanskrit works, including the widely acclaimed *Bhishma Charitam*, for which he is being conferred the Shreevani Alankaran for the year 2006. Without doubt, this is a befitting honour for a reputed Sanskrit scholar.

There is no doubt that by honouring Swami Rambhadracharya of Chitrakoot and Prof. Hari Narayan Dixit, we are honouring our history, our culture and our philosophical, scientific and artistic traditions, of which Sanskrit language and literature have been an integral part. Sanskrit, which is the fountainhead of all our languages, has been enormously rich in all aspects of our cultural, philosophical and artistic traditions. The embodiment of our rich cultural heritage, Sanskrit is the language through which the Indian civilization has found its expression for thousands of years. It is in this language that ancient poetry, romantic prose, lyrics, dramas, fables and fairy tales flourished and thrived in our rich history.

Friends, Sree Aurobindo, while speaking on the importance of Sanskrit language, once said: 'It is of the utmost value to a nation, a human group-soul to preserve its language and make it a strong and living cultural instrument. A nation, race or people which loses its language cannot live its whole life or real life.' Echoing similar sentiments, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote in his *Discovery of India*, 'If I was asked what is the greatest treasure which India possesses and what is her greatest heritage, I would answer unhesitatingly that it is the Sanskrit language and literature and all that it contains. This is a magnificent inheritance... . that whatever the shape of the future may take, one of the biggest, the strongest, and the most powerful and the most valued of our legacies, will be the Sanskrit language.' I am confident that by their untiring efforts, Swami Rambhadracharyaji, Prof. Hari Narayan Dixit and the Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia Shreevani Nyas will continue to preserve and protect one of our cherished legacies.

With these words, I have great pleasure in conferring the Twelfth Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia Shreevani Alankaran, 2005, on Swami Rambhadracharya of Chitrakoot and the Thirteenth Alankaran, 2006, on Prof. Hari Narayan Dixit. I am sure they will continue to devote themselves to the cause of Sanskrit. I also take this opportunity to extend my best wishes to the Ramkrishna Jaidayal Dalmia Shreevani Nyas whose services to the cause of Sanskrit are highly commendable.

Thank you.

PHYSIOTHERAPY: ITS ROLE AND RELEVANCE*

I am happy to have the opportunity to associate myself with the 45th Annual Conference of the Indian Association of Physiotherapists here this morning. Hardly I am competent to speak on the subject and my experience is based on my acquaintance as a beneficiary. Of course, physiotherapy is acknowledged as friend of the old as its timely intervention greatly contributes towards enhancing their quality of life.

Ever since the introduction of physiotherapy as a specialized area of learning in medical sciences, in the first quarter of the last century, the discipline has grown in importance and today has become a prominent subject of medical education and research.

As an integral part of medical sciences it is to be borne in mind that every area of learning has its own importance and only when all the streams and allied disciplines pursue excellence and perfection can medical science as such grow and the society take the maximum benefit from them. Every stream should be able to attract talents and provide opportunities for growth and excellence.

There are various diseases demanding only the intervention of the physiotherapist and there are instances where after medicine and surgery fail, the timely and positive intervention of a competent physiotherapist can give relief to the patient. This is the lesson we can learn from the role of the physiotherapists in the physical, mental, economic and social rehabilitation of the neuropathy victims in the Behala region of West Bengal in 1988.

From the experience gathered in different places, it appears that the physiotherapists do effectively assist in health promotion and disease prevention strategies, as well as in identifying and providing remedies to a myriad of health conditions. Studies in the West have shown that timely intervention by the physiotherapists do help in lowering the indirect hospital costs for the patients. One study has proved that the use of physiotherapy consultation services by a group of primary-care physicians in the West resulted in changing their disease management approach in almost 50 per cent of the cases that they referred. An increase in referrals to physiotherapy

* At the 45th Annual Conference of the Indian Association of Physiotherapists, Kolkata (2 February 2007).

was noted with a simultaneous 50 per cent reduction in referrals to medical specialists. In yet another study of physiotherapists working in general practitioners' offices, found that over a period of one-year on-site physiotherapy services resulted in 8 per cent fewer referrals to Orthopedic and 17 per cent fewer referrals to Rheumatology specialists.

Treatment through physiotherapy in private industry has been shown to reduce the number of workdays lost due to injury by as much as 60 per cent with a corresponding reduction in the workers' compensation claims and an overall reduction in the medical costs. It has also been seen that ergonomic evaluation of the worksite by the physiotherapists can help immensely in evolving injury-prevention strategies by the factory and industrial establishments. Another study has established that the majority of patients on an English orthopaedic waiting list could be effectively managed by a physiotherapist with extensive experience.

These studies stress the importance of evolving an inter-disciplinary and integrated approach to addressing the challenges in the health-care sector in our country too. Every branch of study in medical sciences has its own relevance and can contribute in its own ways in the preventive, curative and rehabilitative aspects of medical care.

Like all other disciplines, a physiotherapist should endeavour to excel in the field keeping himself or herself updated on the latest developments in this important area of study. In fact, life-long learning and professional development should be the hallmark of a committed physiotherapist. In that endeavour, they should also try to benefit from our own traditional system of medicine, especially Ayurveda. It is said that physiotherapy should also integrate itself effectively with yoga. Whereas physiotherapy is taken more as a therapeutic intervention against a particular disorder or experience of loss of mobility, yoga is known to be of great relevance as a holistic and preventive exercise regime.

An important area where the practitioners of physiotherapy need to focus is on research, which is essential to the growth of any discipline and should encompass all domains that impact on the practice of physiotherapy and patient care. The practitioners should promote research efforts and share freely the results of such research and evaluation through the various available routes of dissemination including by publication in professional journals, through conference presentations and by using the media effectively.

In this context, one can visualise about the larger social role of the physiotherapists in a country like ours. In India, the reach of this profession is mostly confined to the cities and urban centres. As many of us here would acknowledge, the general awareness about issues of health-care is

unfortunately poor among our rural population even though they are the victims of various kinds of diseases and often do not receive proper medical care and attention from any quarters. Benefits of the developments in science and technology should not be confined to the city-dwellers. Everyone should be willing to reach out to the villages and the physiotherapists, with their focus on keeping people functionally fit, should be willing to take their services to the rural population also.

I understand, the Government of West Bengal has taken various initiatives to give due recognition to the profession and to encourage specialists and specialization in this important area of medical sciences. I am happy to note that the Indian Association of Physiotherapists has been actively endeavouring to highlight the growing role and relevance of physiotherapy in today's world and in promoting the values of professionalism, integrity and commitment among the practitioners of this important profession. I wish the Association the very best in its endeavours.

Thank you.

CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS: TRUSTEES OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT*

It is indeed a matter of pleasure and an honour for me to be able to associate myself with the Annual Day Celebrations of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, which is one of the important and reputed professional organizations of our country. I thank you for giving me this opportunity to share some of my views with you all on some important issues concerning the profession of Chartered Accountancy.

At the outset, I would like to compliment the Institute for effectively regulating the profession of chartered accountancy in India and also for constantly endeavouring to promote professional excellence among your fraternity. One feels happy to note that during its more than fifty years of existence, the ICAI has achieved recognition as the premier accounting body, for its contribution in the field of education, professional development and maintenance of highly meritorious and ethical standards of accounting and auditing. The Institute deserves appreciation for its achievements and setting of high standards to help the accounting professionals of our country compete with the best in the world.

The Institute has indeed made giant strides with the number of its members rising from a mere 1,500 in 1949 to over 1,35,000 currently. One feels happy to know that the accountancy profession in India has the distinction of not only being one amongst the largest in the world, but also of enjoying the reputation of being one that is highly professional and technically sound, having a high degree of financial discipline and rigour.

The accountancy profession has a very dynamic role to play in the growth and development of a country's business and economy. Its role becomes far more crucial in the wake of a series of concerns such as lack of resources, unplanned investment, high level of development expenditure, and, above all, the need for effecting economy, efficiency and accountability in the utilization of scarce resources. It is the responsibility of this profession to provide systems, standards, procedures, tools and training to bring about financial discipline, control and accountability at all stages of developmental

* At the Annual Day Celebrations of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, New Delhi (4 February 2007).

expenditure and resource mobilization. It has to provide realistic methods of evaluation and future projections and also the ability to foresee and avoid pitfalls inherent in the development process.

The twin forces of liberalisation and globalisation have led to a remarkable surge in the volume of business in the last couple of decades, highlighting the need for greater vigilance, scrutiny and transparency in the working of business organisations. These forces have also led to unprecedented changes in the corporate world and have been instrumental in creating innovative means for communicating financial information to the market place. The field of information technology too has witnessed remarkable advance resulting in dramatic changes in the way business is being transacted all over the world. The wide expansion of global markets has greatly influenced the movement of funds. Innovative financial instruments have been evolved to deal with new global economic realities and a more complex business environment. As a result, the world of accountants has also undergone a sea change, presenting newer challenges and further opportunities.

As chartered accountants are entrusted with the authority to attest on the corporate accounts and practices, they are the guardians of financial probity. Transparency, accountability and responsibility are integral components of not only good governance practices, but also the hallmarks of your profession. Your commitment to these values is not a mere desirable qualification but an essential requirement of your profession. It is undoubtedly a continuous challenge to your profession to constantly meet the demands for quality information and honest disclosures on the financial transactions in the capital market. There is no doubt that the higher the quality and integrity maintained by you in your role as key providers and verifiers of financial information, the stronger and more resilient will be the capital market and, resultantly, the economy. I understand that your Institute has taken a number of initiatives towards laying down ethical guidelines and standards. The *suo motu* decision of its members to undertake peer review and financial reporting review re-inforces their commitment for improving the quality of their functions which definitely sends the right signal to the stakeholders. The ICAI's initiative to restore the credibility of the auditing process of public sector banks by engaging only the RBI-nominated auditors for this important job is commendable and is in public interest. This will, no doubt, help in ensuring greater transparency and accountability in the functioning of those banks.

With economic reforms and liberalisation of the economy, there has been a remarkable change in the way Chartered Accountants are now looked upon. In the constantly changing world, one can find a major shift in the role of an accountant. Today's accountant is a total business solution provider. The new economic realities have further changed the form, content and context of

accounting and auditing. With more and more people entering the business world, they consider you as 'trustees' of the stakeholders' interest and expect you to be watchful in your role as a business advisor as well as an auditor.

In recent years, we have seen a spate of business acquisitions made outside India. This requires our professionals to develop a global perspective. While new business acquisitions open a new vista of opportunity for our professionals, it also poses a challenge for the professionals in the accounting, auditing and related fields in acquainting themselves with the laws, practices, accounting standards and regulations prevailing in other countries.

The ever-changing market environment has been posing numerous challenges to the accountancy profession also. With better economic opportunities, a class of investors is emerging with adequate funds and necessary inclination to invest, but it has to rely on your profession for giving meaningful information in order to make informed investment decisions. These investors need simple, quick and easy to understand responses from you as total solution providers. With e-commerce gaining ground, the increasing proliferation and complexity of global financial issues, transactions and standards have enhanced the challenges for your profession. As professionals, you must make full use of the latest advances in the information technology as this makes communication faster and more effective.

I must compliment your Institute for its innovative endeavours to bring about continuous reforms in its education and training-related programmes aimed at enabling the Chartered Accountants to learn the best of competencies. It is also a matter of satisfaction that the Institute has kept its work programme structured in a manner that all its educational and training programmes benefit from emerging global economic and financial scenario through super-specialised courses, in addition to the regular ones. The Limited Liability Partnership Bill, when passed, will enable formation of multiple discipline partnerships. This will not only help Industry at large but will facilitate close interaction amongst professionals of various disciplines and thus could be used as an opportunity for integrating them.

As specialists in accounting, auditing, tax consultancy, finance and business advice, you are in the best position to provide the right inputs towards the development of a result-oriented tax policy and better tax administration. Your professional advice is much desired by the Government for the formulation of tax-related policies and also in the designing of tax laws with a view to ensuring the adoption of the best practices. With the adoption of the Value Added Tax regime, the policy-makers will be able to reach out to the large number of dealers and assessees falling within the ambit of VAT with your help.

Our Tenth Plan document identified quality of governance, transparency and accountability as some of the key priorities before our development planners. These are some areas which fall within the core competencies of the chartered accountants. Your profession is, therefore, expected to provide a business model for increasing the momentum of economic activities through good governance and competitiveness. Chartered accountants have an important role in enabling institutional reforms and capacity building in financial management system at all levels of governance so as to ensure high quality of accounting and financial reporting. It is also necessary to evolve a mechanism for assessment of the quality of programme delivery, in particular, measuring social cost, as it relates to the problems of poverty and ecology. We also need to encourage civil society participation by providing qualitative financial and related information on Government's policies and programmes, particularly at the level of urban local bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Since a large part of our population lives in rural areas, the ICAI is also required to play a pivotal role in the rural sector development by suggesting suitable measures for improving efficiency of financial intermediation and access to financial services in the rural areas, and also for fostering linkages in the agricultural sector between farm and non-farm value addition. As reported, 70 per cent of marginal farmers do not have a bank account and 87 per cent have no access to credit from a formal source. The interest charged on informal borrowings averages about 48 per cent per annum. This essentially means that the farmers who depend on such credit will never come out of the debt trap as the agricultural sector cannot realistically look forward to a phase of more than 50 per cent growth rate in the foreseeable future. Its adverse effects we are witnessing across the country today.

The ICAI has an important role to play in suggesting legal, policy and institutional measures in improving the efficiency of the financial markets in the rural sector. The Institute should come forward to help the Government in assessing various subsidies so as to ascertain whether these are reaching the targeted beneficiaries and yielding the desired outcomes. I have no doubt that the ICAI, through its wide demographic reach with its more than hundred branches throughout the country and with nearly one and a half lakh members, having the requisite expertise, is ideally positioned to take up a developmental role in various sectors of our economy.

Living as we do in the globalised 21st century, we need to view the world around us not only as offering greater opportunities for achieving individual progress and prosperity but also placing ourselves in a position of greater responsibility towards addressing the problems of the world. The people dying of poverty, the sick, the dispossessed, the illiterate, those denied the basic rights and entitlements for a dignified human existence, wherever

they may be, should also be seen as part of the collective responsibility of the global citizens.

Everyone from the professionals to those even representing the governance structure at different levels, enjoying comfortable living standards today, are increasingly beginning to talk the language of the corporate world where the overriding consideration is maximizing profit and gains and of promoting the rights of those who are already socially and economically empowered. As professionals, largely associated with the economically advanced sections of the society, advising and assisting in the financial management and tax planning, you should not forget your overriding social responsibilities. We must realize that stark contrasts of affluence and deprivation cannot co-exist for long in any society. Only through the collective endeavour of all sections of the society can we uplift those who have not been effectively touched by nearly six-decades of developmental planning. On the balance sheet of developmental planning we all must ensure that the social cost is favourable to the common man.

I congratulate the ICAI on completing 57 years of service to the nation. I am sure that your fraternity would remain ever committed to play their role as a 'trustee' of the stakeholders' interest and render quality services to the business world, keeping the larger social interests in mind. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the recipients of various meritorious awards of the ICAI for their outstanding performance in different areas, particularly, to the higher rank holders in the accounting examinations.

Thank you.

COMMENDING THE NATION BUILDERS*

I am happy to be amidst all of you when CNN-IBN is conferring awards on some of our countrymen who have enhanced the prestige of the nation by their multi-splendoured contributions in diverse fields. I warmly congratulate the awardees who have been chosen after, what I understand, a very thorough and credible exercise.

Our Hon'ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh deserves our heartiest congratulations on his being chosen, most befittingly, as the 'Outstanding Indian of the Year' 2006. I would also like to congratulate Shri Ratan Tata, Ms. Indra Nooyi, Shri Arvind Kejriwal, Shri Jeev Milkha Singh and Shri Rajkumar Hirani who have been selected in their respective categories of Business, non-resident Indian, Public Service, Sports and Entertainment. I compliment Shri L.N. Mittal for receiving the Special Jury Award. Each one of them has made substantial contributions to enhance the country's prestige.

The CNN-IBN deserves our warm greetings for instituting these annual Awards to recognize the contributions of distinguished Indians in different fields. In the last one year since its launch, it has emerged as one of the leading news and public affairs channels in the country, with commitment to professional excellence and the finer values of news journalism. I heartily compliment Rajdeep Sardesai and his team on their remarkable success and I am sure they will continue to uphold the highest traditions of the media.

Friends, ever since Independence, we have been making proactive efforts towards securing a decent and dignified existence for our people. Though we have made rapid strides over the last six decades in different areas of our national priorities, we cannot overlook the reality that we have not been able to redeem in full measure the pledge we took when we made our 'tryst with destiny'. More than anything else, by our unwavering commitment to democratic values and traditions, the country has emerged as the largest working democracy in the world, putting to rest the fears and apprehensions of many around us. And the credit for this goes undoubtedly to our people who, in spite of their myriad problems, have nurtured and nourished the sapling of democracy, which our Founding Fathers had planted in the early years of our freedom.

* At the function to confer the CNN-IBN Indian of the Year Awards for the year 2006, New Delhi (6 February 2007).

In the years since, while convincing signs of prosperity have emerged across the country, which certainly is no mean achievement, we must also acknowledge that there are still many areas of non-achievements and deprivations. On the one hand, thanks to the enterprise of diverse sections of our people, we made possible the Green Revolution and the White Revolution, scientific and technological advancements, economic progress, infrastructural development and the like. On the other, we still have to confront the serious challenges of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of sanitation and health-care and need to do a lot more to ensure basic necessities of life to our citizens as a whole and to create the conditions to provide what our people are entitled to receive and enjoy.

Issues like intolerance, fanaticism, corruption, confrontations and disrespect for dissent are vitiating our socio-political system. The cynicism that is creeping into the minds of the people, especially the youth, is undoubtedly a matter of grave concern. Their questioning of the efficacy of our institutions of governance is something which should make all of us ponder our future direction. All these call for strengthening of our democratic system both in terms of quality and content, as also making our institutions of governance more transparent, accountable, responsible and responsive. The greatest challenge of good governance is to bridge the gap between the expectations of the people and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms, and to do so, all stakeholders, especially the Legislature, the Judiciary, the Political Parties, the Media, the Civil Society and the Academia should play their assigned role. Political apathy has to be replaced by political activism, and in this crucial task, an empowered citizenry must be the torch bearers of our democracy.

Nobody has suggested nor do I believe that there is any better alternative to our form of democracy in which the Parliament as an Institution occupies the central position. To my mind any attempt to denigrate or diminish the importance of Parliament as the greatest public institution or to stifle its proper functioning is not only an attack on the foundations of our democratic existence but also on our basic constitutional edifice itself. If there is no democracy, there will be no freedom of the Press nor Fundamental Rights for the citizens - they survive together or collapse together. Thus it is the vested interest of all, including the media to see that the Parliament and the parliamentary system flourish in a manner, which, while sustaining people's faith in the system, maintains and enhances the dignity of the institution. In fact, every limb of our democratic structure must recognise that the most important imponderable that goes into the sustenance of democracy is the people's faith in its institutions. Preservation of the image and identity of the institutions should become a core concern for all institutions of democracy. The media in the country, if I may say so, has a duty to help sustain people's

respect for democracy rather than becoming a factor in undermining that respect.

Friends, as we know, in a political system that guarantees to its citizens freedom of speech and expression, the media plays a very important role. In a democratic polity, the Press apart from being fearless and unbiased, should, if I may say so, abjure mere sensationalism and projections based on its own predilections and no one's views should be projected as news. In the media, as indeed in any aspect of human life, the truth should never be compromised nor should anybody indulge in half-truths, which will negate the ennobling principles which media is expected to follow.

In this context, it will be worthwhile to recall what Gandhiji had said about the role of the media: '... press is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges the whole country-side and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control. It can be profitable only when exercised from within.'

The success of our parliamentary system depends, to a large extent, on the role of the media in serving as an interface between the Parliament and the people. It will serve our democracy well if the issues discussed in Parliament are provided important and adequate coverage. The media, by all means, should expose the misdeeds of those who deal with public affairs including the people's representatives, but, if I may submit, it should also report as well the commendable work done and the initiatives taken.

It will be a matter of great concern if the citizens lose interest in the democratic institutions and get a feeling that they are of no relevance to them or that they do not matter in their lives. We should not allow anything which would make our citizens become cynical and lose interest in the democratic process, at the heart of which stands the representative bodies. As a parliamentarian, I have applauded the media for its role in exposing the malfeasance and corruption in our public activities. In Parliament, we have taken action whenever misdeeds of our members were exposed by the media. It is the collective responsibility of the society, more specially of the media, which is rightly treated as the Fourth Estate, to seek to isolate those who strive to destroy the edifice of our parliamentary set up.

Parliament has been one of the most harmonising institutions in the country and it believes in a healthy relationship with the other organs of State. As I have said democracy is not a war, but is a well thought out system where institutions have to work together to take the country forward. Unfortunately, our polity today is overtaken by extremely partisan and confrontational politics. There is an atmosphere of intolerance, if not hatred,

towards each other, which is substantially affecting the political morality of our country. My appeal to the distinguished and well-meaning friends in the media is that they have to very seriously ponder and see whether it has any role in isolating the forces of disruption and divisiveness and to consider how to do it. In my very humble opinion, so long as the detractors feel that their disruptive activities receive greater media attention than the discharge of duties in a normal and constructive way, it will only help to encourage those who should otherwise be isolated. I often get an impression that many actions in our political functioning are influenced by the perceived media receptivity.

The CNN-IBN has taken a very good initiative in recognizing the potential of our people and their achievements in important fields of national activity with the institution of the Indian of the Year Awards. As we need sagacious statesmen in the realm of politics who can mould the destiny of the nation with their inspiring leadership, we also need achievers in other fields of national endeavour. Dr. Manmohan Singh is the finest example of clean and value-based politics and deserves the gratitude of the nation for his effective leadership. He believes in the politics of consensus and has a very scholarly and pragmatic approach towards his missions in life and in addressing the challenges before the country. He has ceaselessly striven for an India with capable and empowered human resources, and an India which actively engages itself with assurance and confidence with the rest of the world. In Dr. Manmohan Singh, we have a Prime Minister who leads the country with vision and sagacity. I once again congratulate Dr. Manmohan Singh on the conferment of this prestigious Award.

The choice of Shri Ratan Tata for the CNN-IBN Award too is certainly commendable. Over the years, he has added further prestige and lustre to the Tata Group by his inspiring leadership. His laudable entrepreneurial skills and his humane concerns on societal issues are widely appreciated and respected. I am sure, we will be travelling in his small car, to be manufactured in Singur by 2008, which people like me will be able to afford. By securing the Corus bid, Shri Ratan Tata has enhanced the value of not just Brand Tata but also India Incorporated.

One of the finest examples of the epitome of our managerial skills and leadership qualities is Ms. Indra Nooyi who has been associated with some of the leading multinational corporations in the world and presently heading one. She has emerged as one among the most recognized icons of corporate success from India.

We now have a very forward looking and pro-people legislation passed by our Parliament which recognizes people's right to information. Shri Arvind Kejriwal richly deserves commendation for his pioneering campaign in the cause of people's right to information.

It is extremely important that sports and games are promoted in the country with zeal and commitment. Like his equally illustrious Father Milkha Singh, Jeev Milkha Singh has done the nation proud. He is the first Indian to make to the top 50 in the Official Golf Rankings and has earned laurels for the country.

Creative artists and film personalities have made Indian cinema a household name everywhere due to the creative excellence of our film makers, like Shri Raj Kumar Hirani. The remarkable success of his 'Munnabhai' series is itself a tribute to his artistry and skill.

Very few can match Shri L.N. Mittal's accomplishments outside India in the field of business and entrepreneurship and he is today among the greatest achievers in the global business.

Friends, the pursuit of excellence has to become a national goal and shared aspiration if we are to occupy the pre-eminent position among nations. While aspiring to be a knowledge superpower, we must facilitate creation of opportunities for millions who can perform in all fields. The CNN-IBN Award winners whom we are honouring today are great achievers worthy of emulation by our countrymen. I am sure they will serve as role models and promote excellence in their chosen fields and bring more laurels to our country. I wish them the very best in their endeavours. Once again, I heartily compliment the CNN-IBN on honouring these outstanding Indians as part of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of our Independence which will certainly inspire others to utilize their energy and potential for the development of a strong and vibrant India.

Thank you.

LAW AND SOCIAL CHANGE*

It is indeed a privilege and an honour for me to have been invited by this great seat of learning, the Aligarh Muslim University, to deliver the 2007 Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Lecture organized by its Dr. Ambedkar Chair of Legal Studies and Research.

I am happy to get this opportunity to come to this great institution hallowed by the memory of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the Founder. The University owes its origin to his reformist vision, who thought much ahead of his time. He had realized that lack of education was the main cause of backwardness of the Muslim community and he wanted the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College established by him, which has ultimately been transformed into this University, to act as a bridge between the old and the new and the East and the West. He realized the importance of modern and scientific education at a time when religious education had become the adopted method and he actively advocated the necessity of modern and scientific education.

Sir Syed's endeavour was to produce men of modern temper through education. He wanted that the students of the college should preach the gospel of free enquiry, of large-hearted toleration and of pure morality. As was stated by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad 'Sir Syed had established at Aligarh not only a college but an intellectual and cultural centre in tune with the progressive spirit of the times'.

All along, Sir Syed propagated secular education. As Professor Irfan Habib has stated, 'the secular education that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan promoted had the object of accepting and disseminating the great achievement of modern natural science.' He was rightly recognized as a versatile genius.

Today the University has become a symbol of modern and progressive educational institution. It is not merely a University or a mere Institution of higher learning, it is a movement, signifying the unity of the Nation. Sir Syed's gospel of unity in the country lives on in each and every student of Aligarh Muslim University. It has produced outstanding leaders and statesmen in different fields, who have left their distinctive mark in shaping

* At the Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Lecture on *Law and Social Change*, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (24 February 2007).

the destiny of India. The University enjoys the honour of having been led and guided by many outstanding academicians like Dr. Zakir Hussain, Prof. Badruddin Tyabji, Prof. A. M. Khusro and Prof. Mohammed Hamid Ansari, to name a few. I feel extremely humble to be speaking to this distinguished gathering in this great institution.

The University deserves commendation for organizing a Lecture Series in the memory of Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, one of our greatest jurists and educationists, whose sterling contributions to the framing of the Constitution of India and in building modern India are recognized and acknowledged gratefully by the nation. Dr. Ambedkar was indeed a multi-faceted personality: a teacher, lawyer, constitutional expert, social reformer, a crusading champion of the rights and entitlements of the deprived sections, and a statesman of high standing. He had a profound understanding of the country's social system, particularly of the hierarchical and oppressive caste system that was largely instrumental in denying a vast segment of our society the enjoyment of basic human rights and dignity. He had personally experienced that even the attainment of high education and employment could not reverse the stigma of being born in a so-called 'low-caste' family. The life of Dr. Ambedkar was a saga of a long and arduous struggle against the curse of untouchability and all forms of discrimination and he always led from the front. His contribution for building social and political awareness among the people, particularly among the *Dalits* and the so called lower castes, for their rights and entitlements to lead a life of human dignity and to enjoy full equality with all our citizens has brought about substantial changes in our social and political structure. His life was dedicated to the realization of social equality among those, otherwise considered untouchables, and for the rights and dignity of the scheduled castes with a say in the affairs of the State. In this context it is worth recalling what Dr. Ambedkar had observed:

> There can be no gainsaying that political power in this country has too long been the monopoly of a few and that many are not only beasts of burden, but also beasts of prey. This monopoly has not merely deprived them of their chance of betterment, it has sapped them of what may be called the significance of life. These down-trodden classes are tired of being governed. They are impatient to govern themselves. This urge for self-realization in the down-trodden classes must not be allowed to devolve into a class struggle or class war... .
>
> Therefore, the sooner room is made available for the realization of their aspiration, the better for the few, the better for the country, the better for the maintenance of its independence and the better for the continuance of its democratic structure. This can only be done by the establishment of equality and fraternity in all spheres of life.

As the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Dr. Ambedkar made the establishment of social and economic democracy along with political democracy as the cornerstone of our Constitution, so that it would be the instrument of social and economic change, in which Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy would occupy the focal position. In his Address in the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar forcefully gave his view on what should be the ambit of Political Democracy. He said:

> We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things.

For him, 'democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living of conjoined communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen'. His dream was that the people should imbibe true democratic principles and values, a democratic way of living to achieve progress and was firm in his conviction that radical changes could be brought about only through democratic means. He believed that parliamentary democracy would be able to stand the test of time and it alone could bring about radical changes in a peaceful way through debate and discussion, whereby substantial changes in the economic and social life of the people could be brought about without political or social turmoil. To him, the parliamentary form of government was the best suited to meet the needs and aspirations of the people ensuring social justice and political recognition. Speaking about Parliamentary Democracy, Dr. Ambedkar once said:

> It is workable, it is flexible and it is strong enough to hold the country together both in peace time and in war time. Indeed, if I may say so, if things go wrong under the new Constitution, the reason will not be that we had a bad Constitution. What we will have to say is that man is vile.

To Dr. Ambedkar, Constitution was the vehicle of social and economic change and he envisaged Parliament to actively facilitate social engineering

through progressive legislations. Emphasizing the role of Parliament in heralding an age of social change, Dr. Ambedkar said:

> Customs prevailing in the society are, no doubt, important but customs are not static. They keep on changing. Obviously, in a democracy, Parliament can play an important role in changing customary law. In earlier days, when the institution of Parliament was non-existent, people regulated their life by making their own customs. But today this work rightfully belongs to Parliament and to no one else... to say that nowhere customs could be altered, amended or changed is really to abrogate the authority of Parliament.

As a tribute to the memory of one of the main architects of the Constitution who believed in bringing about societal changes through constitutional and legal process, I have decided to speak today on 'Law and Social Change' before this august gathering.

Law facilitates organized life and the progress of the society and should reflect on the social realities, in order to meet the changing requirements of the society. According to the celebrated Judge of US Supreme Court, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'Law is not a brooding omnipotence in the sky, but a flexible instrument of social order, dependent on the political and other values of the society which it purports to regulate.' Law cannot be static and has to evolve with social, economic, legal, educational, scientific and technological developments. Law has to adjust itself to the requirements of time and the emerging realities of societies, which law-makers should take note of and react appropriately to meet with the same.

The laws that were operative in India during the Colonial rule were introduced to serve the interests of the imperial rulers and hardly took notice, except on some rare occasion, of India's social needs. Laws during the British rule were used as instruments of political and social subjugation of the Indian people without adequate concern for using them as vehicles of social change. Of course, due to the crusading and pioneering efforts of great reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy and Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, law for the abolition of the barbaric Sati System and for permitting widow remarriage among Hindus could be passed during the period of the British Rule.

We inherited an extremely complex social structure at the time of Independence. It was characterized by a unique, multi-textured and multi-layered nature, where segments of society were virtually condemned to lives of exclusion, denial and institutionalized deprivation.

With our independence in 1947, happily the objective of law-making has changed consistent with the mandate of our Constitution, which seeks to

establish justice — social, economic and political, and to achieve the overall development of our people who have had to suffer the ignominy of being a subject nation. Law-making in Independent India had to take into account the necessities of our people, their aspirations, genius, and legitimate desires. It was rightly felt that to address the myriad problems that India inherited in the wake of freedom, a new sociological approach for reconciling conflicting social interests and values were necessary, consistent with the legitimate demands of the people coming out of darkness of slavery, for bringing peaceful social change through the processes of law-making, for which adequate provision was made in the Constitution itself.

Adoption of a democratic Constitution for India, with Fundamental Rights of the citizens and Directive Principles of State Policy, clearly indicates the objective and the processes of social change as conceived by our Founding Fathers, requiring the citizens to make voluntary adjustment to a new social order through adopting appropriate legislations by the Houses of Parliament consisting of elected representatives of the people. It was obviously contemplated that such legislations would be directed to provide the overdue changes in the society which were of pressing nature; at the same time, adjusting individual interest with that of the community's good and the overall welfare of the nation.

Therefore, on our journey as an independent nation our representative institutions embarked upon the great task of nation-building by initiating implementation of the declared objectives of the Constitution. As a result, several path-breaking legislations were introduced to address some of the major areas of concern in the country, particularly on the agrarian, labour and the social fronts. The Judiciary also had recognized the need and the compelling social requirements for such legislations in the country.

In the Keshavananda Bharati case, the apex Court responding to the tide of rising economic claims of the agrarian and the landless rural masses, recognized that in a country like ours the right to property cannot be a sacrosanct fundamental right. For law to be responsive to the social developments and to the need to change the social system in a progressive direction, it is necessary for all the institutions of governance to work unitedly. It calls for close co-operation between a watchful Executive, a concerned Legislature, and a socially sensitive Judiciary to work in harmony for the fulfillment of our constitutional goals.

The Founding Fathers took great care to make specific provisions in the Constitution designed to bring about social and economic transformation in a peaceful and democratic manner. The Preamble reflects the spirit of the Constitution in no uncertain terms by proclaiming the resolve of the people to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic,

promising to secure for the people all the ingredients of a true and modern democracy. The Preamble reflects the broad framework of ideas which are deeply ingrained in our national heritage and are a part of the Indian ethos for which the Constitution stands as also the fundamentals on which it has been founded, namely, the resolve to secure for the people Justice — social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all, fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. The Constitution also enjoins upon the State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, gender, place of birth or any one of them. The constitutional mandate of non-discrimination also implies that the benefit of all the policies and programmes of the Government should reach all sections of the population.

Part Four of the Constitution details the principles which should guide the State, including all institutions of the State — in promoting the welfare of the people so that social justice should permeate all institutions of our national life. The Directive Principles require the State to secure for citizens various rights — social, economic and political.

Granville Austin, in his well-known book on the Indian Constitution, has referred to Part IV of our Constitution in the following terms:

> In the Directive Principles, however, one finds an even clearer statement of the social revolution. They aim at making the Indian masses free in the positive sense, free from the abject physical conditions that had prevented them from fulfilling their best selves....The essence of the Directive Principles lies in Article 38.

He further observes in his book:

> The Constitution was to foster the achievement of many goals, transcendent among them was that of social revolution. Through this revolution would be fulfilled the basic needs of the common man, and, it was hoped, this revolution would bring about fundamental changes in the structure of Indian Society — a society with a long and glorious cultural tradition, but greatly in need, (the Constituent) Assembly members believed, of a powerful infusion of energy and nationalism. The theme of social revolution runs throughout the proceedings and documents of the Assembly.

The intention of the framers of our Constitution was to outline the guiding principles of social change in our constitutional scheme rather than to go into their specifics. It was rightly left to our representative institutions to comprehend the basic spirit behind these guiding principles in its varied

dimensions and provide the framework and the modalities of social engineering by way of social legislations. That is the higher social philosophy of our Constitution.

The Constitution lays down the utmost emphasis on equity, equality, dignity of the individual and the rights and duties of the citizens. Our Founding Fathers were conscious of the iniquitous social order which prevailed in our country, and the centuries' old customs and practices which imposed inhuman disabilities on a vast segment of our people. The Constitution, therefore, provides for affirmative action for the benefit of the weaker and the vulnerable sections of society. Thus, special attention was sought to be given for the amelioration of their hardships.

It should always be borne in mind that the Constitution is the supreme organic law of our country and is the fountainhead of social engineering giving direction to the organs of State for societal transformation and progress. It was recognized that to remove the social and economic infirmities, there must be a close correlation between various laws we enact for ourselves and the fast changing social and economic realities. To bring about inclusive development, they decided to establish a system in which the efforts of the various organs of State sub-served the norms of equality, liberty and Rule of Law, with the primary objective of promoting the orderly development of the nation and to provide speedy justice at affordable cost for our people. Accordingly, they envisaged a rich body of constitutional law which was designed specifically to bring about social and economic transformation in a peaceful and democratic manner.

Our national leaders were of the opinion that excessive power, if vested with any of the three organs of the State, could possibly undermine the foundations of democracy and, therefore, could impede the processes of people-centric social and economic change. Accordingly, they combined a judicious blend of checks and balances determining the functioning of our democratic organs in such manner that each one of them functioned within its assigned limits, complementing and supplementing each other's efforts to provide, among other things, speedy justice to all. In fact, the idea of separation of powers and checks and balances are the two important pillars identified by our visionary Founding Fathers, in the Constituent Assembly, for the specific objective of securing a reasonable degree of equilibrium in the polity. In this constitutional scheme, it is the Parliament that enacts laws; the Executive implements them; and the Judiciary is the independent arbiter interpreting them.

However, there is hardly any doubt that it is the Parliament that has been accorded the pre-eminent position to initiate and complete the process of social transformation. Being the supreme law-making body articulating the

hopes, aspirations and grievances of the people, its consistent concern and endeavour has been the promotion of social equity in a manner acceptable to the people without leading to any major upheaval.

The Constitution warrants the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary to be sensitive to the concerns of the vulnerable sections and to work harmoniously for their welfare and emancipation so that the task of nation-building will be a coordinated endeavour. The Fundamental Law also recognized the wide array of diversities prevalent in our country, which called for special efforts from the organs of State to work in harmony. Our Constitution being people-centric, their elected representatives, out of whom the Executive Government emerged, have been given a special position of rights as well as duties in our Constitutional scheme.

Being the only body amongst the three organs of the State which is elected by the people, our Parliament has come to be identified, to be the pivot of our political system. It has been instrumental, while respecting the sanctity of the Constitution, in ensuring that the fundamental law of the land keeps pace with the changing needs of a growing society by taking recourse to the constituent power bestowed on it as and when the situation so demanded and for taking the initiative for many progressive legislations in the larger interest of the country.

Friends, ever since Independence, we have been making proactive efforts towards securing a decent and dignified existence for our people. Though we have made rapid strides over the last six decades in different areas of our national priorities, we cannot overlook the reality that we have not been able to redeem in full measure the pledge we took when we made our 'tryst with destiny'. We still have to confront the serious challenges of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of sanitation and health-care and need to do a lot more to ensure basic necessities of life to our citizens as a whole and to create the conditions to provide what our people are entitled to receive and enjoy.

The Constitution imposes a sacred duty upon all the organs of State to be sensitive both to their creator, the Constitution, as also to the hopes and aspirations of the people for safeguarding whose interests they are created. The whole system must recognize, as Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer, one of the outstanding jurists of our time, said:

> The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, the bonded labourer, the pavement dweller, the damsel in distress, the sweated worker, the starving child, the dalit, the tribal and the socio-economic pariah shall have a vested interest in the Republic, only if the Constitution has a vested interest in their survival, their human worth and personhood.

If different institutions work at cross purposes it would defeat the very object of social legislations and lead to confusion and disarray in society. We must bear in mind that democracy can sustain itself only so long as the people view it as the best system sensitive to their needs, aspirations, urges and even the nightmares.

Often, we come across instances wherein the legislative intent is eroded by one or the other organ of State which is not a very healthy development. For the smooth functioning of our parliamentary system, it is important to recognize the constitutionally assigned roles of the different organs of the State. The Constitution empowers only the Legislature to enact laws. After all, the sovereign will of the people is embodied in the supreme legislative institution of the country.

It is necessary that all the organs of the State see various legislations in their social contexts, keeping in mind the larger social philosophy of our Constitution. Social legislations are not an area for classic interpretation only, but a means of emancipating the countless millions who still stand on the periphery of progress. To construe law in its social dimension, it thus becomes necessary that everyone, particularly the Judiciary, comprehend it in its true spirit, its setting and social history, and is motivated by the larger public good. Mr. Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer's observations in his book, *'Law and Social Change'*, in this context, merits to be quoted here:

> The driving force of social change, in the Indian context, is the rediscovery of the goals of our freedom struggle, the realization of our national identity, the reflection of our founding faiths and fighting creeds, the strengthening of our resolves and launching on our future with a flaming spirit, at once authentic, impatient and adventurous, a militant awareness that we are a people with a commitment to social justice... . The political declaration of the independence is our incarnation to a nation, the economic declaration of independence is battling for self expression, marching from the Constitution toward, law in action... . A powerful, planned comprehensive legal Protestantism, radical enough to abandon the spell of five-star prosperity and to wage war on mass poverty and social disability is the demand on the Indian jurists.

Justice Iyer's recent comments are even more pertinent to be quoted here:

> Judges are under the Constitution, not over it....the Judges should have concern for the spiritual-compassionate perspective of swaraj jurisprudence and poverty-oriented justice for which India struggled and gained freedom....all should have commitment to the

> developmental policy for the backward billions whose resources are being greedily privatized by billionaires, foreign and indigenous. With privatization and globalization, mega-corporations are competing for power... . It is obligatory that our rulers, executive, parliamentarian and judicative uphold the interest of the masses and the suppressed.

The Houses of Parliament and the Executive have the responsibility to give shape to the constitutional directives for social emancipation as well as for the overall development and progress of the country. Our Parliament has indeed worked as a vehicle of social engineering and its initiative, all these years, in enacting several laws to bring about social change, for comprehensive land reforms, to help provide just and humane conditions of work, to ensure maternity relief, to provide protection to women at the work place, to broaden the base of women's participation in politics, to safeguard the vulnerable sections against social discrimination and violence and atrocities, against child marriages, to regulate the practice of dowry, to provide a conducive environment for the development of children, to put an end to the sexual exploitation of women and their indecent representation, to protect women from domestic violence, to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of our society, including women, children and the minorities, to ensure rural employment, and thereby to address rural poverty, among others, has to be viewed from this broad social perspective. Several laws have been passed over the years prohibiting practices that are inimical to the societal development, and for the creation of a civilized society. For such purposes, amendments to some of the provisions of the Constitution and the existing legislations have also been made to keep pace with the requirement of the times.

However, it is ironical that laws that are targeted to improving the lot of ordinary citizens create, in reality, a series of intractable hurdles in the quest for accessing what are legitimately their guaranteed rights. Many of the radical laws, with far-reaching goals, are not even known to the vast majority. Unfortunately, there are very few programmes to advance legal literacy. Further, to compound this problem, in spite of the provisions for Legal Aid, litigation almost stubbornly remains a costly and cumbersome process, that is quite beyond the reach of those whose lives they are meant to impact and enhance. There are major stumbling blocks in ensuring enjoyment of legally enjoined entitlements.

Thus, there is the need to address the moot question, whether the Constitution and the various measures taken by the Parliament and the other organs of the State have been able to make a positive difference in the life of the ordinary man and woman, the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes, the backward classes, women, children and the minorities? Unless there is a

change in the basic social structures that are exploitative and discriminatory, the society will be prone to incessant social conflicts.

Unfortunately, the implementation of laws has been the 'Achilles Heel' of the Indian polity. This has been proven time and again. The reasons are well documented and have to do, *inter-alia*, with lack of political will, administrative under-preparation and finally, insufficient societal sensitization, which leads to, at best, half-hearted attempts at foisting changes which barely have a chance of making their mark. It is said, with ample justification, that even if a small percentage of the existing laws were implemented in the right spirit, we would be way ahead in terms of progress and development!

The new Right to Information Act does provide a lever to concerned, vigilant citizens and organizations, to galvanize governance, but it is not enough merely to 'know'. The crux of the matter is to enforce accountability. I feel that while we have been successful — to an extent — in bringing about a small measure of openness in our systems and functioning, we have miles to go in making those who govern and take serious note of people's genuine problems and issues. In such circumstances, cynicism and disillusionment are bound to set in and take deep root, with far-reaching negative consequences.

I strongly advocate a relook at all our laws, especially those relating to bringing about socio-economic change and improving the quality of life of millions of disadvantaged so that we emphasize on only those that are relevant and have very good prospects of vigorous and honest implementation.

We need to develop the art of co-existence between the diverse sections of our people. Secularism is one of the most important pillars of our nation and it is not a luxury to be tolerated by the political class selectively if our national unity and integrity are to be sustained. Intolerance, negativism, hatred and violence that have been generated in the country in the name of narrow, parochial, sectarian, religious and other divisive issues have greatly vitiated the political atmosphere in the country and have inhibited our development. Therefore, we need to constantly highlight issues which unite the nation rather than that which divide it.

One of the principal reasons for the various initiatives for socio-economic development bypassing a significant segment of our population today is the lack of access to a quality education relevant to their requirements. Expanded educational infrastructure by itself does not ensure access to education to all. Poverty and gender prejudices, apart from physical distances to educational institutions do inhibit access. Most importantly, the quality of education itself in terms of its inadequate relevance to the world of employment is also adversely impacting on retention even if there is access.

Friends, providing institutions of governance is much easier than making them function in a manner sensitive to the needs of the people, accommodating the concerns of the marginalized, and with an all-inclusive and long-term vision for the whole country. What our people are looking forward to today is a socially, economically and politically empowered India. Such an India will be free from the scourges of communalism, poverty, illiteracy, exploitation and unemployment and free from the feudal hangover, and will provide plenty of choices for the fuller development of our human potential and ensure a decent and dignified existence to all its citizens.

We have to channelize the energy and talents of our youth in a productive way. Large-scale unemployment leads to frustration, particularly among the educated youth and contributes to the emergence of various fissiparous tendencies and social and political tensions. It is, therefore, essential for the economy to create the right kind of opportunities to absorb our manpower effectively. It should be the commitment of all to see that the new initiatives for economic development, whether by the Government or the corporate sector, and the endeavours of our institutions of learning, result in generating more and more employment opportunities. The Government has taken an important step by passing the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, in this regard. The youth, especially those who have the benefit of modern education, rather than indulging in criticisms and fault-finding with the imperfections in our political system should come forward to share the responsibilities for correcting the aberrations in it. Towards the end of the deliberations of our Constituent Assembly, its President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, exhorted its Members stating:

> We have prepared a democratic Constitution. But successful working of democratic institutions requires in those who have to work them willingness to respect the view-points of others, capacity for compromise and accommodation...

Friends, remarkable developments of far-reaching nature are impacting the lives of our nation and people as never before. In an increasingly globalized world, the institutions of the State have a pivotal role to play in facilitating social change. This is particularly so in the case of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society like ours. As I have said, even after nearly six decades of Independence, we are still confronted by a plethora of problems — social, economic and political. At the same time, the expectations of the people are rising. If we fail to live up to these rising expectations of the masses, the consequences can be calamitous. Socio-economic democracy, as envisioned by our Founding Fathers, still remains a distant dream. It can be ensured only when the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary work in tandem. If we have to realize the socio-economic objectives of the Constitution and thereby bring about constructive changes in society, all of us have to work

harmoniously towards social engineering. Every organ of the State must be sensitive to the expectations of the poor and the marginalized among our people by whom several decades of developmental endeavours have passed without making much of any positive impact.

All of us, in our respective positions must do our bit, as people legitimately have a right to expect more, especially as we move centre-stage in the International arena as an Economic and Knowledge Super-Power. We can ill afford to have huge chasms between what is promised and what is actually delivered to its citizenry in the world's largest functioning democracy.

As the Speaker, I am determined that Parliament must be given its due respect as the ultimate repository of people's hopes and expectations. Among other initiatives to bring Parliament closer to the people, I have, in consultation with Leaders of all Political Parties in the Lok Sabha, introduced a 24-hr. Television Channel, the only one of its kind in the whole world. I hope you get to see it as through this medium I dream that the electorate will be able to judge the law-makers and the laws that are being passed in the Temple of Democracy. I shall be happy to throw open the proceedings of the Parliamentary Committees to the Media, where laws are debated in detail, if my colleagues in the House agree, so that you may also participate in the process of ushering in socio-economic change in a more meaningful manner.

Finally, it is equally important not to lose the proper perspective and to understand that we cannot simply legislate our way out of all problematic situations. Therefore, it is necessary that the existing mind-set must undergo a change and innovative strategies put in place. Well thought, thorough, multi-pronged approaches are likely to yield rich dividends in the given scenario of having to grapple with major challenges of disparity and underdevelopment that continue to confront us after 60 years of self-governance.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar always stressed on the imperative to make our political democracy a social democracy as well. For him the formal framework of democracy was of little value unless there was social democracy. He forcefully advocated that democracy was incompatible with any thing that promotes or protects discrimination and exclusion and divides people into privileged and underprivileged. With our framework of political democracy already in place, we should implement our Constitutional directives to make and enforce laws to bring about economic and social democracy to the centre-stage of all our developmental programmes so that the fruits of development are enjoyed by one and all and human dignity remains inviolable under all circumstances. Economic growth has to be accompanied by social and economic justice, as was conceived by great leaders like Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar.

Thank you.

It gives me immense pleasure to be amidst you on this very important occasion of felicitation of 10 women Achievers in different fields, who have established themselves as shining symbols of 'Nari Shakti'. To each one of them, I offer my sincere congratulations. The recognition is a befitting tribute as part of the 'Ananya' Festival, which is being celebrated over a week in connection with International Women's Day. The Day is observed to endow women with a sense of honour, dignity and self-respect. I consider it a unique initiative and congratulate Smt. Renuka Chowdhury, Hon'ble Minister and her Team for organizing this very special Event.

Many of the selected Achievers have made their mark in spite of difficult and trying circumstances by overcoming obstacles through sheer grit and determination, and that is truly laudable. They can justifiably be the icons for our country's youth, especially girls. I am happy to learn that the selection of the Achievers has been very fair and transparent and covers all regions of the country, varied sectors and different socio-economic backgrounds.

The importance of women who constitute 49 per cent of the country's population, in the growth and development of family, society and nation hardly needs any emphasis. We cannot claim to have progressed in the real sense if women remain largely untouched by our achievements. Government has been pursuing a three-dimensional strategy for development of women, namely, social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice. Two important strategies of Women Component Plan and Gender Budgeting are being pursued. Legal safeguards for women are monitored by the National Commission for Women so that there is complete empowerment to ensure the realization of the goal of a democratic, progressive and egalitarian society.

However, our developmental indices are not yet satisfactory. Illiteracy, malnutrition and violence continue to plague women today. In this situation, we must realize that the responsibility of making every woman an 'Ananya' is not only that of the Government, but of all citizens.

As Speaker of the Lok Sabha, I would also like to encourage and motivate more women to come forward and participate actively in the political

* At the Function to Felicitate Women Achievers on the occasion of the International Women's Day, New Delhi (9 March 2007).

structures and processes and in public life. Women have already made their mark in *Panchayats* and other local bodies. It is my dream that during my tenure the Women's Reservation Bill will be passed and we will cross the unsatisfactory 9 per cent mark of women's representation in the House of People. I also hope that we will soon award the Outstanding Parliamentarian's Award to one of my distinguished lady colleagues!

I am convinced that there is tremendous scope for many more women to overcome economic and societal barriers and realize their full potential. For this to happen, it is very important that the overall environment must be positive, supportive and genuinely enabling as women are still called upon to shoulder multiple responsibilities and function as 'superwomen'. These women achievers who have received the country's appreciation on this occasion are indeed role models and they represent many unsung achievers in various corners of the country.

Hon'ble Minister, by reaching out to all sections of women and publicly acknowledging their abiding contributions, events such as today's will have a tremendous long-term impact. I strongly recommend that this should be done on a regular, sustained basis so as to motivate millions of women to step beyond the thresholds of silence and move to realms of great achievements and well-deserved acclaim!

I congratulate you once again and wish you the very best for a stellar future. Once again, I express my deep admiration to all the Women Achievers.

Thank you.

RURAL INDIA: DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES*

It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to be here today at the 26th Annual Convocation of the Institute of Rural Management, Anand, which has carved out a niche for itself as a prestigious centre of higher learning, not only in India but also across the world. I am grateful to Dr. Y.K. Alagh, Chairman of IRMA, for extending this invitation to me and giving me this opportunity to interact with all of you. The students of the Institute are indeed fortunate to have him as its Head. A renowned economist, erudite academician, eminent parliamentarian and a distinguished former Union Minister, Dr. Alagh has impeccable credentials to lead any organization to greater heights of excellence. I am confident that under his inspiring leadership and able stewardship, the young rural managers at IRMA will find a new zeal and passion for bringing about innovations and improvements in managing the vast rural economy of our country. I am sure they will be proactive and concerned with the common people and certainly more disciplined than even some of the members of our Parliament.

I heartily congratulate the bright young students who have completed their studies here and are being awarded degrees. It is no doubt, a momentous day in their lives. Getting admission to this prestigious Institute and successfully completing its intensive course are certainly a matter of pride for the students and their families. As the students move out of the portals of this Campus tomorrow, they will find a new world of challenges and opportunities. With both practical and theoretical training from this Institute and with the inputs and guidance of the learned Faculty members, they are now well-equipped to make use of their knowledge and training for the betterment of the people, particularly of those who are living in the remote rural areas of our country.

At a time when reputed Business Schools and Management Institutes boast of astronomical salaries and perquisites that their students are offered by multinational corporations and big corporate houses, I am immensely proud of all of you at the IRMA for yielding to the call of the nation. Your desire to work in the rural areas to help uplift the vulnerable strata of our society and thereby to empower them economically and otherwise is highly commendable.

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* Address on *Rural India: Developmental Challenges*, at the 26th Annual Convocation of the Institute of Rural Management (IRMA), Anand, Gujarat (3 April 2007).

The Institute of Rural Management is indeed a pioneering institute in India in the field of rural management and as its mentor said, it is 'a pathfinder'. The genesis of IRMA, I believe, was in response to the need for professional managers — intelligent young men and women who are fired by a burning desire to transform rural India, equipped with adequate skills and knowledge of management education, and combined with a development orientation. It is the synergy between the innate native talent and the earthy common sense of the farmers and the artisans on the one hand and the professional expertise of people, educated and trained here like you on the other, which can deliver the best results. That, I understand, is the rationale and the spirit behind the establishment of this Institute.

Friends, India is emerging as a major power with the economy registering high growth rates and our cities and urban centres beginning to display marks of affluence, but yet there is no uniform development of the country, the rural hinterland not being able to march in tandem with urban India. More than 70 per cent of our population resides in villages — incidentally, 80 per cent of our poor also live in rural areas. It is a matter of concern that the benefits of economic growth are not percolating to more than two-thirds of our population. The visible symbols of development like the skyscrapers, the multi-lane expressways and highways, the expensive cars on the city roads, the glittering malls and shopping arcades and the conspicuous life-style of the burgeoning middle class in urban centres should not make us forget the problems of the larger population residing in the rural areas. I have chosen to speak today on 'Rural India: Developmental Challenges', as a reminder to ourselves of the unfulfilled promises and of the responsibilities that lie ahead for the future managers of rural India as also for those invested with the duty of addressing the concerns of our rural masses. Ultimately, our objective must be to ensure that the benefits of our faster economic growth is shared with the masses in an inclusive manner, a cause to which, I am sure, all of you at IRMA are fully dedicated.

The Indian economy is the fourth largest in the world today. But the various socio-economic indicators reveal that our growth pattern is not uniform for all the sectors of our economy. While the rate of growth for manufacturing, services and communications sectors has substantially improved, in the vital sectors like agriculture, infrastructure development and community and social services and in rural development as a whole, our performance is not appreciable.

It is obvious that without the development of rural people, the country can never claim to be developed. In recent years, the agricultural growth in India has fallen and so have investment and profitability of agriculture, net sown area under crops and the area under irrigation. According to the

Economic Survey 2006-2007, low yield per unit area across almost all crops has become a regular feature of Indian agriculture.

It is widely acknowledged that currently rural India is in the midst of a crisis. As observed by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, the distinguished agricultural economist, 'the agrarian crisis has its roots in the collapse of the rural economy.... Unemployment leading to out-migration of the assetless is growing. The minimum support price mechanism is not operating for most commodities. At every level of the livelihood security system, there is a tendency to make profit out of poverty. Something is terribly wrong in the countryside... .'.

Today, finding themselves helpless in the face of adversities of various kinds, the Indian peasantry in different parts of the country is resorting to the extreme measure of ending their own lives. Repeated crop failures due to unpredictable climatic variations, inability to meet the rising cost of cultivation and the increasing debt burden are among the factors leading our farmers to growing frustration expressed in extreme ways. It is more alarming that farmers' suicides are no longer limited to the drought and poverty-stricken areas. Even those in the most productive agricultural regions in several states are ending their lives because of their massive indebtedness. In such a scenario, meeting the challenges of rural reconstruction becomes a formidable and priority task indeed.

Agriculture being the main stay of our economy, it is imperative to have a comprehensive and time-bound programme of action to extricate the sector from stagnation, if not deceleration. Much larger irrigation facilities, better seeds and agri-inputs and fertilizers at reasonable costs will have to be provided to the farmers along with the most vitally needed finance and adequate infrastructural and marketing facilities. Agriculture must be turned into an income generating activity and the farmers should not be left to the vicissitudes of uncertain weather, uncertain financial resources and uncertain markets.

To increase productivity and employment generation in the agriculture sector, there is a need to bring about structural changes, primarily based on Land Reforms, as support prices and provision of cheap credit do not help beyond a point. Experience has shown that providing the poor with access to land is not anti-growth. In rural growth strategy, the dynamism of small family farms plays an important role. Contrary to much conventional wisdom, this means increasing the share of farmland operated in small units, which are demonstrably more poverty-reducing than large holdings and are typically more productive per unit area.

In this context, I would like to share with you some little-known facts about the agricultural turn-around made by the State of West Bengal, mainly due to the extensive land reforms measures undertaken by the State Government over the last three decades.

Land reforms in West Bengal has had two important components: Tenancy Reforms, popularly known as *Operation Barga* (Share Croppers) and the Redistribution of land. *Operation Barga* gave 1.5 million *bargadars* or registered tenants, a permanent and heritable right to cultivate the leased land, of which over 30 per cent were *dalits* and 12 per cent *adivasis*.

1.1 million acres of agricultural land has been re-distributed in West Bengal among 2.9 million landless and marginal farmers' families, 55 per cent of whom are from the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Apart from agricultural land, 6.8 lakh households below the poverty line have been given homestead land. With a view to promoting gender equity, it has been ensured that the *pattas* that is title-deeds are either in the joint name of husband and wife or in the name of the senior-most female member of the household.

These institutional reforms in ownership of agricultural land have unleashed the peasantry's productive forces in a significant way resulting in an increase in the foodgrain production at the rate of 6 per cent per annum, making West Bengal the country's largest producer of rice and the second largest producer of potato. Its other positive impacts included increasing Cropping intensity from 136 per cent in 1980 to 180 per cent today, the second highest in the country, contributing to a consistent share of 3.6 per cent for agriculture in the State's GDP, compared to the country's figure of 1.53 per cent. Having the highest growth of per capita Net State Domestic Product during the 1990s resulted in a decline in the percentage of population below the Poverty Line from 60 per cent in 1977 to 21 per cent currently. This has also contributed to a rise in the per capita calorie intake in rural Bengal by 9.6 per cent during 1983-84 period, whereas at the national level it decreased by 3 per cent during the same period.

The growth in agricultural output in turn has also resulted in a substantial increase in the real wages and in increased employment opportunities. A survey by the National Council of Applied Economic Research states that adult agricultural labourers in West Bengal work an average of 178 person-days per year, which is the second highest among the major States and 30 per cent more than the national average.

Another visible impact has been on the actual purchasing power of the people of the rural areas. The National Sample Survey reveals that the rural Bengal is spending Rs. 20,000 crore on industrial goods per year and that this is expected to grow by more than 8 per cent annually. In West Bengal today,

there are 5.3 lakh Self-Help Groups involving about 53 lakh beneficiaries, of whom 90 per cent are women. By next year, the total number of beneficiaries under Self-Help Groups is expected to exceed the number of beneficiaries of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. I have highlighted these facts about West Bengal only to draw your attention to certain tested remedies for effectively addressing the problems of the rural sector.

To come back to the national scene, we find that 87 per cent of our villages are in clusters of population of 2,000 or below, which in turn provide small markets without efficient linkages and financing options for which the farmers have fallen prey to parasitic middlemen and moneylenders. In addition, in many cases, very low quality agricultural-inputs, sometimes even spurious products affect the overall productivity and that tends to trap the farmer deeper into poverty.

Further, rural India needs better and more roads, adequate quantity and quality as also dependable and larger power, telecom and distribution facilities. More than 30 per cent of India's 6,40,000 villages are still not connected by roads. Around 60 per cent of rural households do not have access to electricity. Rural tele-density is still below 2 per cent. Given such inadequate infrastructure, agricultural products have extremely inefficient connectivity to markets, and post-harvest losses tend to be very high, leading to distress sales and once again, poor value recovery for the farmers.

We cannot afford to leave the agriculture sector to the vicissitudes of an imperfect market. Apart from the short term measures such as remunerative support prices and making cheap agricultural credit available, it is important that the Indian State makes substantial long-term investments in minor irrigation, water conservation, building rural roads and markets, electrifying villages, providing robust primary education and health facilities in the rural areas.

Our experience in the last several decades has conclusively proven the efficacy and potential of the co-operative movement in addressing the problems of rural India. Co-operatives play an important role in developing a strong 'social capital base' in rural areas which is a prerequisite for food security and sustainable development. As Dr. Norman Borlaug observed, citing the experience of Anand, that 'the co-operative movement ..... has proved beyond doubt that farmers who control their resources and hang together in mutual — self-help organizations — co-operatives — controlled from their grass roots — can discover enormous political and entrepreneurial power'.

The ongoing globalisation and economic restructuring pose new challenges for the agricultural co-operative markets. To take advantage of the globalising economy, co-operatives must adapt themselves to the changing

situation and bring in greater professionalism, technology upgradation (including IT-enabled services), greater resource mobilization, diversification of activities and promote the tenets of good corporate governance within their frameworks.

To this end, the Parliament of India is examining the Constitution (106th) Amendment Bill, 2006 which seeks to insert a new Part 9B in the Constitution, providing for greater autonomy, accountability, professionalism and transparency in the functioning of co-operative societies. Once this Bill becomes an Act, I am confident, it will reinvigorate the co-operative sector, and enable it to compete in a highly competitive scenario.

While poverty in India is decreasing, concerns over food security, particularly in the rural areas, are increasing. Even in States where the poverty ratio has fallen, unemployment among the rural masses has increased, suggesting a significant proportion of rural population still being threatened by the lack of access to the means of livelihood and their potential vulnerability to food insecurity. In many villages, most households have to rely for their food security on the government-run ration shops and low-quality food-grains. It will, therefore, be important for our policy-makers to encourage locally controlled and managed grains banks with a high level of community involvement to ensure food security to the rural people. Our success story with the co-operative movement can guide us in this.

Since rural development essentially encompasses a multi-disciplinary approach, there must be an inbuilt mechanism to involve people's representation in the conceptualization, planning and management of any rural development programme, particularly relating to crop production, water conservation, minor irrigation, etc. We also need to lay greater emphasis on the farmers' training and skills development of rural artisans and unemployed rural youth which will help in generating employment, enhancing production and productivity and in improving their social and economic conditions.

The development of rural India will have to go beyond traditional forms of farming and agricultural activities. Social and farm forestry to enhance livelihoods, creation of watershed development, a larger focus on livestock development, fishery, poultry and other non-farm activities must get equal focus.

India is the second largest grower of fruits and vegetables. In spite of that, our share of horticulture exports is a mere 1 per cent of the global trade. In fact, 30 per cent of the total horticulture production is wasted due to improper handling, lack of proper storage and lack of transport connectivity. Today, India ranks first in the world in milk production; also have the largest cattle population in the world, besides other livestock. However, this huge

potential of our agro-economy and that of the animal husbandry sector is not being fully harnessed and tapped. According to the data available, in India, only two per cent of the fruits and vegetables are processed compared to 70 per cent in Brazil, 30 per cent in Thailand, 78 per cent in the Philippines and 80 per cent in Malaysia.

We need to encourage the processed food industry to develop farmer linkages, which will have to include, as part of a consortium partnership, the creation of best practices in horticulture development, cold-chain linkages for storages and transport and finally the processing to add value to agro-products for the home and overseas markets. As the agro-industry in rural areas has a huge potential, it should be properly tapped by technologically, financially and infrastructurally empowering the farmers.

It is well known that self-help is the best help. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are the most eloquent examples of the new 'Social Economy' emerging in India today. Collectively, SHGs represent a large network of grass-root entrepreneurs, for generating incomes in rural areas. Today, there are more than 25 lakh Self-Help Groups in the country with nearly 75 lakh 'Swarojgaris'.

SHGs represent a model of participatory development with a high level of social mobilization and capacity-building of the poor, to enable poverty reduction in all its dimensions. The unique thing about SHGs is that more than half of them comprise women, and members belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. They are proving themselves to be effective instruments of income generation and empowerment of women. The emerging field of micro finance is being continuously expanded by SHGs, with thousands of SHGs being formed each month in the country. We must do all we can to encourage these groups, for it can transform rural India by unleashing the entrepreneurial energies of ordinary Indians.

It is a matter of concern that as part of their restructuring exercises, Nationalised banks are winding up many of their rural branches, making the availability of credit to poor farmers even more difficult. Our small farmers have various financial needs for undertaking farming activities on their lands. The lack of micro-level financial institutions in our country has been a major source of distress to the farming community. Micro-financing as an effective tool of empowering the rural poor has been adopted in many developing countries. The Grameen Bank experiment in Bangladesh indicates that by adopting certain innovative practices such as specifying eligibility based on assets held, provisions of loan in small installments, etc., it is possible to target the beneficiaries to a large extent. The advantage of micro-financing over general loan lies in its meeting the requirements of activities which were already being pursued by the beneficiary. There is no reason why the success of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh cannot be replicated in our country.

In this regard, we should all bear in mind that among the poor in the rural areas, rural women, who generally bear the primary responsibility for the nutrition of their children, are the poorest and the most vulnerable. We must find newer ways to harness the untapped potential of our rural women who have the capabilities to usher in an economic and social revolution in the country. With the reservation of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, the rural women have proven themselves to be an effective instrument of empowerment and development in rural areas. It is no surprise that when Prof. Muhammad Yunus started the Grameen Bank experiment to help people in the rural areas of Bangladesh, he chose to advance funds to a group of women. Today, his initiative has come to cover over two million poor women in Bangladesh positively impacting the destiny of a large number of poor households in that country.

Our Parliament, as the highest elected body in the country, has the responsibility to give shape to the constitutional directives for social emancipation as well as for the overall development and progress of the country. It has sought to bring about social reforms and development in the country in accordance with the guiding spirit of our Constitution and the requirements of the changing times. To empower the people at the grass-roots level, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were established by the Parliament by incorporating suitable provisions in the Constitution nearly 15 years ago. These institutions have contributed substantially towards strengthening our rural representation framework besides empowering our women and the rural masses. These PRIs should play the role of the harbinger of people's empowerment to usher in a social and economic revolution. In another major step towards rural development, our Parliament passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in 2005 to ensure the basic means of subsistence to the millions of our rural households.

The *'Bharat Nirman'* programme aimed at creating massive rural infrastructure by focusing on the areas of irrigation, roads, rural housing, rural water supply, rural electrification and rural telecommunications connectivity, if pursued seriously with a sense of accountability, has the potential to address many of the developmental issues of rural India.

We will be able to realize the full developmental potential of rural India only when the rural masses are extended the benefit of quality education. As Prof. Amartya Sen puts it 'the Indian Economy may be doing much better than before in many different ways and yet it is still paying quite a heavy price for having a far less educated general labour force .... Lack of educational opportunities afflicts the lives and freedoms of a large proportion of Indians'.

It is important for us to recognize that the developmental challenge in rural India is not about making a choice between the imperatives of Industrial development and the compelling need for agricultural growth, but it is essentially about helping the rural sector realize its own potentials for development by fruitfully using the gains of modern science and technology and industrial development as such. It does not make good economic or political sense to reduce the whole issue to one of a choice between one sector or the other. We have to successfully explore the unexplored potential of all the sectors for the overall development of the country. In today's developmental environment, it is not realistic to conclude that the development of rural India can be achieved relying exclusively on agriculture. What we need is an integrated development strategy which will take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the different sectors of our economy and one in which the agents of development would intervene according to the need of each sector and the different regions of the country. Wherever possible, we should amalgamate industry and agriculture taking into account the imperatives of development, the possibilities and the resources that a particular region can offer. Without making use of the potentials offered by the industrial sector, particularly in the areas like agro-based industries and the small and medium scale industries, rural sector can only look forward to stunted growth. The self-appointed champions of agriculture and rural India today also need to pause to introspect and see, if the posturing they are taking is really helping to effectively address the developmental challenges of rural India. If the objective of developmental planning is to ensure a good quality of living to all sections of the people, particularly to the rural masses who have not been effectively touched by the efforts of the past nearly six decades, we need to have the willingness to review our own approaches and devise new ways wherever necessary.

The candid observations made by Prof. Amartya Sen merits mentioning here:

> We cannot reverse the economic predicament of the poor across the world by withholding from them the great advantages of contemporary technology, the well-established efficiency of international trade and exchange, and the social as well as economic merits of living in an open society. Rather, the main issue is how to make good use of the remarkable benefits of economic intercourse and technological progress in a way that pays adequate attention to the interests of the deprived and the underdog... the real issue is ..... the iniquity in the overall balance of institutional arrangements which produces very unequal sharing of the benefits of globalization. The question is not just whether the poor, too, gain something from globalization, but whether they get a fair share and a fair opportunity.

We have to strive for growth with a human face that is socially equitable and regionally balanced, where all the sectors and the entire population partake of the fruits of our growing economy. We need to look at future progress with a new concept of Gross National Entitlement — a country where our people, specially those belonging to the vulnerable sections of the community, will be entitled to earn their living, to have quality education, the right to access good health-care, to obtain basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, drinking water and indeed will be entitled to and actually have the freedom to live in dignity, instead of being forced to accept what is being doled out by the system.

This is not an impossible or an unrealistic objective to be realized for our people. We have the examples of several countries, which by determined efforts have effectively addressed the problems of underdevelopment and inequity within very short span of time in recent decades. Only last week I have had the opportunity to visit Vietnam, leading a Parliamentary Delegation there, and witness the incredible developments that country, which was exploited by long periods of colonialism and ravaged by imperialist wars, could achieve in a short period both in its urban and the rural areas. We have been able to ascertain that every village of Vietnam has the benefit of good road connectivity, dependable energy, medical and educational facilities and other things that are essential for enjoying a good quality of living. They could achieve all that because of the unity of purpose, dedication and commitment of the people and their leadership. We can also achieve such great heights or even surpass them provided we also demonstrate the will, the commitment and a passionate desire for addressing the problems of underdevelopment.

Friends, addressing the developmental challenges in rural India is not about approaching the issue with a patronizing attitude, but is essentially about recognizing the rights of our rural people who constitute nearly 70 per cent of our population, for equitable opportunities for development and for enjoying its fruits. In all our developmental initiatives our rural masses' concerns, their needs, apprehensions and frustrations should receive adequate attention and committed endeavours will have to be made to accommodate and address them.

I would, therefore, appeal to all sections of our political spectrum that the issues of rural India, where agriculture, no doubt, occupies the central position, should be treated as major national issues, transcending all political and geographical barriers and partisan considerations so that the core of our national endeavour can be the speedy and comprehensive development of the rural India. In this challenging task the nation's primary duties will be to ensure quality education, adequate health care, sufficient infrastructural

facilities for development and for better standards of living. The future of India lies in the development of rural India and it can not be subjected to partisan political confrontation. Let us unite to tackle this most important national issue so that we, all together, can wipe out the scourge of poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, lack of health care and unemployment from the face of this great country of ours.

In the ultimate analysis, I believe that we all stakeholders need to focus on comprehensive rural development which will take into account our rural economy, rural society and culture, as also local-level institutions, and in which the *Panchayats*, the Self-Help Groups, particularly those formed by women and farmers' organizations, will be required to play the lead roles. We should treat our large rural population as manpower rather than as a liability, for whom we have to perpetually provide subsidies and adopt welfare measures. We have to think of ways to empower them socially, economically and politically so that they become proactive partners in the country's overall development. I recognize that we stand today at the cusp of a turning point which has the potential to bring rural India into the mainstream of economic development. No challenges come without opportunities. I strongly believe that today we have an unparalleled opportunity to harness the maturity in our economic system, the technological advancements brought about by the infotech revolution, and the potential of a global market to bring in a new dimension of development to rural India. There is an unmistakable realization and emphatic acknowledgment not only in India but also abroad that if the 21st Century is going to be the Asian century, then India will be playing a pivotal role in making that happen. And for that, we have to carry on board our large rural populace as well to actualize the dream of developing the nation.

All of you who have assembled here today to receive your honours and degrees are bestowed with a heavy social responsibility to transform the backyard of our national economy. Rural development, which is the main objective and thrust of the IRMA, should be at the centre stage of our economic policies and programmes if the economic development process has to acquire sustainability and vibrancy. The wheels of industry and commerce could rotate smoothly only with a strong agriculture and prosperous rural hinterland.

Before I conclude, I wish each one of you the very best in the exciting task of national development for which you have dedicated yourself. I would also like to thank Dr. Y. K. Alagh once again for inviting me here and giving me this opportunity to interact with our young and promising rural managers, our leaders and achievers of tomorrow.

Thank you very much.

NEEDED—AN AGENDA FOR THE YOUTH*

I am very happy to have the opportunity to associate myself with the Graduation Ceremony of your College, an academic institution of great merit. I am grateful to Dr. Ambrose Pinto, the Principal, and the College Management for their kind invitation.

Over the years, the St. Joseph's College has become a well-established centre of higher learning, earning the coveted autonomous status with an A Grade accreditation with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and recognition by the University Grants Commission as a College of 'Potential Excellence'. All these speak volumes of its excellent standard and attainments as an educational institution. The college's mission statement, its ideals, its vision, its overriding social concerns, its focus on character formation and on nurturing secular values, and, above all, its performance record over the years, are truly inspiring.

I extend my heartiest congratulations to all the students who have successfully completed their graduation here. The completion of 125 years of this prestigious College makes this occasion more momentous. Over the years, this College has nurtured and produced a large number of progressive, socially sensitive and conscientious citizens who received very high level of education and have done our country proud in different ways. Late Comrade P. Sundarayya, a student of the College, became one of the pioneers of the progressive political movement in the country. I compliment all those who have contributed to making this College a centre of excellence and creativity.

Friends, this year we are completing six decades of freedom. This year also marks the 150th Anniversary of one of the most heroic and epoch-making events in our struggle for freedom — our First War of Independence of 1857. These are occasions to remind ourselves of the values that guided our freedom movement and of the numerous struggles and sacrifices of millions of our people led by broad-minded and visionary men and women, who, motivated only by the good of our country, and not by any self-interest, plunged themselves into that long-drawn struggle.

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* At the 125th Graduation Ceremony of the St. Joseph's College, Bangalore, on *Sixty Years of Independence: An Agenda for the Youth*, Bangalore (29 April 2007).

The students of history will recall how that patriotic war inspired many others, young and old alike, in joining the nation-wide movement for our freedom in the years that followed. The sagacious and inspiring leadership provided by men like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and several other great men and women in the later years, expedited our victory over the colonial rulers. The relentless and uncompromising struggle waged by youthful and revolutionary leaders like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru, Khudiram Bose and others and their ultimate sacrifice for the cause of freedom, stand out as shining examples of selfless service for the cause of this great country.

Our struggle for Independence was not just a movement to free ourselves from the bondage of the British rule. It was as much a crusade to free ourselves from the various social evils and socio-economic iniquities and discrimination to lift the deprived and the downtrodden from the mire of poverty and to give them a stake in the socio-economic transformation of the country. Today, it is for us to introspect and see to what extent have we been able to realise the dreams of the martyrs and leaders of our freedom movement and of the Founding Fathers of our Republic. Have we succeeded in realising their dreams about a resurgent India and an egalitarian society free from class and caste exploitation and from the scourges of poverty, communalism and oppression?

Over the six decades of freedom, no doubt, we have made significant achievements in almost all areas of our national life. At the political level, we gave to ourselves a well-defined and elaborate Constitution that has stood the test of time. Our democracy has been witness to as many as fourteen General Elections at the Centre and many more elections to the State Legislatures and other representative bodies. In the process, we have consolidated our democratic edifice and emerged as the largest working democracy in the world. Over these years we have striven to improve the quality and content of our democracy by making it more inclusive, people-centric and transparent. Through several progressive legislations, we have sought to address serious socio-political and developmental issues. Our legislations in the areas of democratic decentralisation, women's empowerment, children's welfare, land reforms, and providing employment guarantee, etc. have helped in addressing many adverse legacies we had inherited at the time of freedom. The adoption of the concept of five Year Plans have helped us in taking substantial sections of our people from below the poverty level to a more meaningful and dignified existence. In recent years, our economy has been growing at a very fast pace. Today, India is acknowledged as a significant player in the world economy.

However, in spite of the substantial progress made in the last six decades, we have all to work hard, as much more remains to be done to make India a truly developed and prosperous nation and to take the benefit of our progress and development to all sections of our people.

In our national endeavour, we have to give priority to the efforts to remove poverty from the country. Though the seventh largest in size, we are home to the second largest population in the world, which puts enormous pressure on all our resources. We have challenges to meet in the vital areas of education, health care and infrastructure development, among several others. We have to succeed in achieving full literacy for our people stressing on providing quality education and vocational training. The issue of empowerment of women needs to be paid special attention so that they can live with dignity and honour and have easy access to education, health-care and job opportunities and can be free from societal prejudices and discrimination.

I would like to take this opportunity to call upon our enterprising youth, specially those who have had the facility of receiving high standard of education, to make their contributions for all-round progress of our country. With about 43 per cent of our population being young, India has enormous human resource, which can help in bringing about fundamental changes by contributing to the process of accelerated growth and development.

We have the potential and the resources to become a vibrant and achieving nation. To succeed in that, our people, particularly, the students and the youth will have to help in removing the impediments on our way. Today's youth will be the future leaders of our country and they will also be the beneficiaries, if we are able to make our achievements in different spheres of national life more meaningful and inclusive.

The new economic forces of today are bringing along with them new opportunities for development and for contributing to nation-building. No doubt, India's growth today is powered by the energetic contribution from 500 million youth and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the sustained 8 per cent growth rate of the country has been made possible with the combination of the multiple talent, hard work and sweat and toil of our youth. It is, however, important for us to ensure that we do not leave anyone behind and that the benefits of development reach every one. The educated youth should not merely be content with lucrative jobs but they should imbibe an entrepreneurial spirit so that they are able to create opportunities for many others as well.

Our youth should also be concerned about the fact that there are several areas of national and global importance where our performance record is much below our own potential. Sports, scientific achievements and research

as such are areas where we need to prove our merit more convincingly. Just as today our IT and management professionals are making their mark everywhere, with committed endeavours we can prove that we are second to none in other areas of importance. These are the challenges for our youth to take up for their own future and of the country at large.

Our Parliament, the highest political institution in the country, has always been alive to the need of involving the youth in our democratic processes. You would recall that it was through the 61st amendment to the Constitution that our Parliament brought down the eligibility for voting from 21 to 18 years so that our youth could have greater opportunity for political participation in the country. This momentous decision enabled millions of our youth to influence our electoral system, thus providing on opportunity to decide on the leaders who should manage the affairs of our country. Similarly, the implications of the opportunities for political participation created through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments by our Parliament also should not be lost sight of. With that, the minimum eligibility age for election to Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipalities was also lowered to 21 so that younger blood could come into them with their fresh ideas and ideals for addressing the developmental challenges at the grass-roots level. Taking advantage of it, today thousands of youth, particularly women, are getting training in local governance, democracy and developmental schemes. These local bodies are expected to act as nurseries for future leaders at both regional and national levels. It is, therefore, up to our youth to avail of the opportunities for contributing to the developmental processes and to help bring about positive impact on the system, improve it and turn it into the India of their dreams, by actively participating in our political system.

It is with an idea to sensitise our young members of Parliament about the issues and challenges before the youth and to promote greater awareness and focused deliberations on the issues related to youth that I took the initiative to set up a Parliamentary Forum on Youth about two years back. This Forum, consisting of our young parliamentarians, is working as a platform to bring together experts, academicians and government agencies along with the parliamentarians with the object that such interactions will stimulate original and fresh thinking on the issues of youth which hold the key to the progress of our country. The forum has come up with various suggestions, emphasizing on the need to promote scientific temperament and value-based education with more focus on the dissemination of knowledge and awareness on major issues before the country today.

Friends, these are indeed challenging times for the nation. There is, no doubt, cynicism among the people, particularly the youth, about the functioning of our political institutions. Growing corruption, the politics of

confrontation and the culture of intolerance and violence creeping into our polity and the society have left some sections of our youth disillusioned and skeptical about the very efficacy of democracy as a system of Government for us. One cannot deny the existence of criminal elements in politics which obviously leave the youth confused about rights and wrongs. Similarly, forces of divisiveness and communalism pose a grave threat to our democratic and secular fabric today.

But are you to remain as mute spectators to these aberrations in our system? Who is to redeem the system and make it work for the benefit of the nation as a whole? If our youth, to whom tomorrow belongs and as such have the greatest stake in the system, do not come forward to shoulder the responsibilities as citizens in a democracy, who else will act as the catalyst for positive changes in our society?

My young friends, you have to be the crusaders for removing the various ills plaguing our society and to provide leadership to change the system for the better. It is of little use to be just critical of the aberrations or non-achievements in the society. The country has great expectations from its youth to bring in the freshness of their approach along with youthful energy and passion to address the imperfections in the institutions of democracy. They have to realize their obligations and become more proactive participants at all levels of political and other institutions.

Much greater future awaits our young people and they should be the harbingers of the new era. Sweeping changes in our society and in our political and economic life can only be brought about if our youth come forward to play a more active role in the social and political life. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, 'when the *status quo* itself is rank injustice, those who desire to maintain it must be considered upholders of that injustice.' Democracy is only as good as its people. It can become meaningful when educated persons, committed to national causes, come forward to eliminate the shortcomings in the system. If you all cherish and uphold the principles of pluralism and inclusiveness, who can undermine our national unity and social cohesiveness? And conversely, if you fall prey to the divisive and communal approaches can any one save this country?

Even the worst critics of our system have not come up with a better alternative to parliamentary democracy as yet. As Winston Churchill said 'it is the worst system of governance, but for all other systems that have been tested and tried so far.' Our Parliament still remains the most potent vehicle for translating the people's expectations into reality, to bring about socio-economic and political transformation in the country. To make our Parliament and political system more effective, the country requires larger number of committed and well-meaning youth, positively and progressively disposed towards people's problems, to come forward to occupy the political space.

Remember, whether you like it or not, whether you involve yourself in it or not, politics decides your and your country's future. If you only express your disapproval of the overall functioning of our democracy, you may only remain a passive spectator. It is time you offered your services to the country. Representative institutions are people's institutions and as such they are not to be looked down upon, instead they should be treated as the best avenue for public service and for contributing to the process of taking our great country to its rightful place among the comity of nations. Remember that only democracy gives you the power to participate in the nation's affairs, express your opinion and thus to be counted in the political processes.

I would, therefore, expect the new graduates to carry with them an optimism permeated by activism when they are leaving the caring portals of their College. Your mission statement that the 'College seeks to form men and women who will be agents of change, committed to the creation of a society that is just, secular and democratic' and that it 'promotes human excellence through courses and activities that help students achieve personal integrity and conscientise them to injustice prevalent in our society', summarizes the finest objective of education for our country. My request to all those who are passing out of this great institution is that they should always be imbibed with this message in their future life, to serve the nation and the people.

Shunning all divisive thoughts and actions, our people, specially the youth, as citizens of free India, a great country with a great heritage and tremendous potential and opportunities, should march together for reaching greater and greater heights. We must tear down the walls that create obstacles in our march to the future as a united nation and as true Indians. There is no alternative to living with the spirit of universal brotherhood.

Learning is a lifelong process which does not end within the four walls of the academic institutions. As you step out of the corridors of your College, a wholly new and exciting world of challenges and opportunities awaits you. Your ability to convert every challenge into an opportunity will decide your own future and through you that of our country. I am confident that with the kind of orientation provided by your esteemed institution, you will be able to realize your dreams and aspirations in the years to come. I also trust that you will use the education that you have received here and the values inculcated in you to achieve our larger national goals.

If you imbibe the twin principles of 'Faith and Toil' which is the motto of your College in all your endeavours, you will serve the country better. Whatever you do, pause for a moment to think if it will be beneficial to the society and to your country. The sky should be the limit for you. The whole

world opens up before you as your stage, so act prudently and decisively to make a positive impact in the lives of millions of our people. I wish you all success in your future endeavours.

I hope this College, which is synonymous with excellence, will continue to produce committed, responsible, disciplined, well-integrated and socially sensitive citizens who will be assets of our country. I convey my best wishes to all of you. Once again, I extend my sincere gratitude to the Principal and the Management of the College for giving me this opportunity to be with you on this auspicious occasion.

Thank you.

It is indeed a matter of pleasure and an honour for me to have the opportunity to associate myself with this Workshop, organized for the benefit of the members of Parliament. I am happy that Shri Rahman Khan, the distinguished Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, who is one of the leading Chartered Accountants in our country, has taken the initiative to organize it. This shows his abiding interest that Hon'ble Members of Parliament should have due acquaintance with subjects of importance in our nation's life so that they can make knowledgeable contributions in the deliberations in Parliament. This is the advantage of having professionals as active parliamentarians.

Governance at all levels has to be responsible for the management of public resources under their control and for providing social services. For the resources under their control, the liabilities they incur, the cost of services they provide and for the cost of the recoveries they make, the Executive or the administration is accountable to the Legislature or the other people's representative bodies at the appropriate level. This accountability is what differentiates democracy from other systems of Government.

Not all parliamentarians are expected or even required to be experts in all subjects. Financial or budgetary matters require a lot of expert and professional study. However, it will considerably help parliamentarians to have knowledge of the same to discharge their responsibilities in a befitting manner. It is for them to ensure that there is transparency and accountability and prudence in managing public resources. Reviews, at regular intervals, of the adequacy or otherwise of the existing system, and of the quality of financial reporting, is essential for effective financial management. It is also imperative to ensure that the accounting and financial reporting system evolve in response to the needs of both internal and external users.

The new economic realities have indeed changed the form, content and context of accounting and auditing, highlighting the need for greater vigilance, scrutiny and transparency in the working of business organisations. The mega corporate failures in different parts of the world, in recent years, is a warning for everyone of the dangers inherent in lax or ineffective auditing and to reinforce the need to streamline the accounting and auditing systems,

* At the Workshop on Government Accounting Reforms in India, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi (9 May 2007).

addressing the deficiencies and thereby to help restore public confidence. It is important to recognize that the consequences of poor financial management in many cases within the Government, may be far more serious than cases of corporate failures.

The current cash-based accounting system of the Government, though has stood the test of time, providing a variety of information, however, is considered by many leading Chartered Accountants and other knowledgeable persons to be lacking in the dimensions of transparency and user-friendliness. The main argument is that, being primarily focused on inputs, the cash-based system cannot be used effectively to fix accountability for non-performance.

It is in this context that a demand is made for reviewing the existing government accounting system in India. In fact, the reforms in government accounting system have been a subject-matter of debate for quite sometime now. This demand becomes far more crucial in the wake of a series of concerns such as lack of resources, unplanned investment, high level of development expenditure, and, above all, the need for effecting economy, efficiency and accountability in the utilization of scarce resources. It is significant, as reported, that both the RBI and the World Bank, in recent years, have emphasized on the need to improve transparency and accountability in fiscal management. I understand, the Twelfth Finance Commission had also recommended the introduction of an accrual-based system of accounting in the Government of India. Since there is a lot of support, from different quarters, to the view that changes are required in the current government accounting system, I hope it will be considered favourably by all concerned.

Governments need timely and accurate financial information for effective budgetary management. High quality financial reporting is a fundamental obligation for maintaining public confidence in the quality of governance and thereby for reinforcing people's faith in democracy. The citizens have a fundamental right to know what happens to the money that they contribute through taxes and duties.

Our Tenth Plan document has identified quality of governance, transparency and accountability as some of the key priorities before our development planners. Wherever necessary, we should introduce institutional reforms for enhancing the effectiveness of financial management systems at different levels of governance. Ultimately the objective of an effective accounting and auditing mechanism should be to see how prudently are the finances of the Government being managed by those who are authorized to spend from the public exchequer at all levels including that of the urban local bodies and the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Transparency is not a matter of choice but an obligation and a pressing need requiring early and radical action. It is also important to evolve a consensus on the need and efficacy of change. As parliamentarians, our common objective should be to bring about financial discipline, control and accountability at all stages of developmental expenditure and resource mobilization.

I am sure, this Workshop would go a long way in enhancing the understanding of the parliamentarians and in sensitizing them about the deficiencies or otherwise in the existing system of the government accounting and of the changes required to be brought about to meet the information needs of different stakeholders, including the parliamentarians, so that Executive accountability in financial matters can be effectively ensured.

Thank you.

SENSITISING THE CHILDREN'S NEEDS*

I am very happy that we have been able to inaugurate a Children's Corner in the Parliament Library which is one of the best libraries, certainly in our country if not in the world. It is one of the dreams which has come true today. All of us want that this library, this store-house of knowledge, is put to proper use and effectively utilised to disseminate knowledge and information to all who have a thirst for knowledge. Last year when the Children's Day was being observed, we felt that by merely observing the Children's Day and not making facilities available to them, we were not doing justice to them. Therefore, it was felt whether in this new library building we could make facilities available to children for reading, painting and even playing along with opportunities for studying. That dream was there. I must congratulate the Secretary-General, Lok Sabha and other officials for making that dream come true. Today, we are seeing the culmination of one of our very humble endeavours. I am thankful to all those who are associated with this.

Now Parliament is one of the most reputed institutions in our country. Parliament is constituted by the people and it is expected of it to make laws and to have proper discussions on important issues. People look at Parliament to provide leadership for resolution of their problems and for making new laws so that the country may progress. That is what ordinary people expect. It is the duty of Parliament to act according to the objectives for which Parliament has been set up. Parliament rightly occupies the pivotal position in this country. Around Parliament, our polity is growing up. I have always felt that it is essential to build a bridge between people of this country and Parliament. It cannot be only a five minute job on a day of elections after every five years or whenever elections are held and then you forget about Parliament except some reports that may be appearing in the newspapers.

We forget or do not think that Parliament is doing very constructive work also and that many epoch-making laws are being made; many policies have been adopted; discussions have been held which give direction to the future of the country as to how the country is progressing, etc. Nobody can deny that our country has progressed considerably during the last sixty years

* At the Inauguration of the Children's Corner in the Parliament Library Building, Parliament Complex, New Delhi (21 August 2007).

of our freedom. Of course, there are very many things still to be achieved and many miles to go. But we should be conscious of the achievements already made and the contribution of Parliament towards that. Otherwise, there will be hiatus and gap between the Parliament which is the supreme organization set up by the people, and the people themselves. This gap, according to my understanding, will not help in strengthening and consolidating democracy in our country. That is why, we felt that the people who have a right to know as to what their representatives are doing should have the first hand knowledge as much as possible as to how they are functioning. That is why, the Lok Sabha Television Channel had been thought of. Yesterday, we celebrated the First Anniversary of this Channel which has earned the confidence of large sections of the people.

Similarly, we want to tell the children as to how our democracy has evolved. Evolution of democracy is not a contribution from any other rulers of our country, not by anybody else; it is our own; India has shown the right way to other countries in this regard; from the days of Buddhism, even earlier, India had practised democracy which is also depicted in the Parliament Museum; not only that our struggle for freedom, the sacrifices made, the contributions made by our leaders, etc. have all been very well depicted in the Museum.

The next aspect is that we have certain Forums. I am very happy that the Parliamentary Forum on Children of which Shrimati Cariappa is presently the Convenor and Shri Sudhakar Reddy who is very actively associated with it, is doing a very good work in discussing the important issues concerning children and also trying to find out solutions. It is having good programmes for the welfare of the children. I also compliment them for the good work that they are doing.

Another thing is that we should really make people aware, especially the children who obviously are the future leaders of our country of the strengths and weaknesses of our democracy. Ultimately they have the responsibility of taking this country forward, to further consolidate democracy in our country, to pervade the knowledge about importance of democracy amongst them, so that they can pass that on to people at large. We do not know of any better alternative, any better substitute to parliamentary democracy. Nobody speaks of it. Therefore, it is our duty and responsibility to improve the manner in which our democracy functions. We have to constantly evolve methods by which people can enjoy their rights in full measure through democratic means, through the parliamentary system of governance which our forefathers, the Constitution makers, after elaborate discussion, selected for governance.

Nowadays, therefore, there is importance for making children aware; they are future leaders of the country; on them will depend how this country

progresses and that is why, it is a national duty to provide all facilities to our children and not to restrict such facilities only to a section of the children, but to those who are denied minimum facilities for no fault of theirs. In this sphere, I must congratulate our very dynamic Minister, Shrimati Renuka Choudhury; I have always been admiring the way she has been functioning, she is trying to protect further, the interests of the women and children in this country. Please keep up your good work.

The facilities which have been offered in the Children's Corner include, children books, multimedia facilities and other such facilities. Some norms will be laid down. We would like to invite Principals of different schools along with the children. Let them come and read books. Of late, children are not that much interested in books than to play with computers. I am not against their playing with computers, but books give a different sort of pleasure which is much more permanent. It has greater impact on the minds than the pictorial representation of certain things. Books are of great eternal value. Therefore, we should inculcate the spirit of reading.

Parliament is the focal point; the central place of the city, and I hope that the school authorities and different NGOs who are working with children, especially those belonging to the vulnerable sections of the community which are denied minimum of the facilities, should enjoy this facility. I would be very happy if these children are brought here so that they get an opportunity to read good interesting books which otherwise they have no access to. It has to be an all round effort by everybody to see that the children get the best opportunity to read.

Earlier it was never thought that anybody could come to the Parliament Complex and see as to how the Parliament functions. When children grow up, they gradually start having faith in the Parliament. They will be zealously guarding the great heritage that we have got from the Constitution-makers. The Founding Fathers have given us this wonderful institution called the Parliament of India. I am sure Shri Achary will find funds for it. There are many organisations like the National Book Trust and the Children's Book Trust. I am sure the Hon'ble Minister has funds to provide us so that we can purchase some books for children. Knowing her great concern for the welfare of the children, I am sure she will divert some fund and give it to us. She will also try to activate children's organisations in different spheres. I am sure children will not only study here but study and play. They can browse through computers a number of things. I would also like that easier access is provided, subject to security problems. Our library is now open to the research scholars. I am told that quite a few scholars are now utilising our library. Our MPs are busy in the other building. I do not want all the children to be inspired by us the MPs! The access to this Corner should be as easy as possible for the children.

I would like to tell children that it is their corner. It is for them to come and enjoy, learn and develop the reading habit as they have a great responsibility of leading the nation when they grow up. We are talking many times of certain things which are not done properly. But we have to rectify them. We cannot think that somebody would come from outside to rectify our problems. It is the people of India who have to rectify it. The future of India is in the hands of children. We have to make facilities available to the children. It is the duty of the grown up and elderly people to see that the children get the best facilities to grow up in their own way. But it is the nation's obligation to provide them all facilities.

I am therefore, very happy today and I invite all the children and also the guardians and school authorities and others to please utilise this Corner which will not only give opportunities to the children to learn many things but they could also learn about Parliament which is the most important institution. We could learn about the parliamentary procedures. I am extremely happy to see that one of our dreams have come true. Let us hope that this will be one of the most sought after Corners of the Parliament Library Building. Once again I congratulate those who have taken part in setting it up. I congratulate the Secretary-General, Lok Sabha, the Lok Sabha Secretariat and others who have put in efforts for putting this up. I am thankful to all of you for attending this meeting and I wish you all the best.

LALIT KALA AKADEMI: PROMOTING ART AND CULTURE*

I am delighted to be here today in this assembly of distinguished artists and to present the 'Lalit Kala Ratna Award', the highest Award instituted by Lalit Kala Akademi, in the field of visual arts, to some of the highly accomplished and respected creative artists of our country. It is appropriate that the Akademi, since the institution of the award as part of its Golden Jubilee Celebrations in the year 2004, honours artists and scholars who have made significant contribution for the development and promotion of contemporary Indian art. All the artists who have been selected for this year's awards for their distinctive contributions, which have enriched our art and culture, deserve our heartiest congratulations.

I would like to thank Prof. R. B. Bhaskaran, Chairman, Lalit Kala Akademi, for the opportunity given to me to associate with this function and to give away the awards today. I am sure, these awards will go a long way in also inspiring the younger generation of artists to carry on with their creative efforts and to explore new dimensions of art and culture and receive due recognition.

The pro-active role played by Lalit Kala Akademi in the promotion of creative arts in our country is duly recognized and appreciated. During its existence of more than five decades, the Akademi has given a new direction to the study and evolution of visual arts like painting and sculpture.

The Akademi's plan to launch special programmes for the progress of traditional art in the country is indeed very commendable as it will provide opportunities for bringing to our cultural mainstream, some of our very talented artists who deserve due exposure and opportunities.

Friends, it is universally acknowledged that artists are in a better position to promote in the country the spirit of co-existence, national unity and social integration, which in a multi-religious and pluralistic society like ours is of special significance. They should by their creations contribute meaningfully to the cause of unity and for our composite culture to grow and flourish.

* At the *Lalit Kala Ratna Award* Ceremony of the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (10 September 2007).

Fortunately, in India, we have a large pool of talented artists and we look forward to their contribution in this regard.

In India, our national leaders made a conscious choice to promote freedom of expression, the essence of which is its indomitable democratic spirit. While making this choice, they were conscious of the universal appeal of art and of the imperative of artistic freedom. Our democracy and the Constitution that we adopted have stressed the essential spirit of freedom of expression in creative arts.

Unfortunately, for some time past, one notices with great anguish and concern, motivated attacks on artists and their works, which are against our national ethos and undermine their basic fundamental right. Such dastardly acts amount to illegal censorship, and inhibit artists' creativity by causing an atmosphere of intolerance and hatred. The well-meaning people of our country should stand up and raise their voice against those who try to put restraints on and interfere with our artists' creative freedom. Reinforcing freedom of expression and consolidation of democratic spirit are the collective responsibility of all of us which we all should be ready to shoulder.

In this context, I would urge upon Lalit Kala Akademi to protect and promote freedom of expression in the country, which is inviolable. It is our primary duty to facilitate the creation of sufficient opportunities for our artists, for encouraging their creativity and for the free exercise of their fundamental rights.

With these words, I once again congratulate the Awardees for their achievements. I sincerely hope that the world of art will continue to be enriched by their creations in the years ahead which will help to promote excellence in our contemporary visual arts. I also extend my best wishes to the Lalit Kala Akademi in all its endeavours towards promoting and preserving our heritage and our art and culture.

Thank you.

TOWARDS A GENDER-EQUITABLE SOCIETY*

It is indeed a matter of great honour and pleasure for me to extend a warm welcome to you all to India and to inaugurate the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians' Conference. There is a symbolism when we meet here in India, a country that has consistently espoused the cause of women's emancipation and empowerment all through its history. During our Independence struggle, the women of our country actively and valiantly participated and fought for freedom along with men. Ever since, they have actively and meaningfully engaged themselves in our socio-economic and political transformation. It is also a happy coincidence that for the first time, our country has a woman President in Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil in the Sixtieth Year of our Independence.

Women, being the major stakeholders in all nations, should have an equal say in matters that affect the welfare of society as a whole. But, unfortunately, this is not happening in most parts of the world. The redeeming feature, however, is that there is a greater awareness now than ever before that the status of women reflects the true stage of progress and development of a country. The condition of women varies from country to country, but practically everywhere, including in developed countries, they are disadvantaged in some way or the other. In some countries while there is still discrimination against women taking up the top positions in the decision-making apparatus, in some others the problem goes much deeper and often pertains to the societal preference for the male child which, in turn, gets translated into institutionalized iniquities faced by women. It is rather unfortunate that pervasive patriarchal attitudes are persisting worldwide and any effort to surmount this malady meets with considerable resistance in society. While incidences of discrimination may be overt or subtle, it works to the disadvantage of women by reducing the opportunities available to them, in the process, preventing them from realizing their full potential.

As you all know, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, *inter alia* emphasized gender equality with a view to sensitising the people about the issue and correcting the gender imbalance. Yet another major step forward in this direction was the

* At the Inauguration of the First Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians' Conference, New Delhi (24 September 2007).

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. In keeping with the lofty ideals, as enshrined in the UN Charter and the CEDAW, four World Conferences on Women in Mexico City, Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing were held under the auspices of the United Nations to address the various issues relating to women's empowerment and mainstreaming them in the decision-making processes. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 were significant steps forward in this regard.

No doubt, over the decades, considerable progress has been made to break the gender barrier and to mainstream women in the political and social processes. However, despite such international commitments to gender equality, women's participation in the decision making process and women's representation in the Legislatures are far from satisfactory. We, in the Commonwealth, and at the CPA in particular, should discuss the issues of women's empowerment in all its dimensions — political, social and economic — through various means and seek to influence our respective Governments to take necessary steps. We are of the view that women's representation and participation is critical to achieving democracy in the true sense of the term which, in turn, can help in ushering in an inclusive society. It is against this backdrop that the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians' Conference assumes importance.

Ever since the idea of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians' Conference emerged from the informal meeting of the Women Parliamentarians held at the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Barbados in 1989, the CWP has spelt out certain definite goals to further the cause of women's empowerment. This include an appeal to all concerned to take the necessary steps to increase the representation of women in Parliaments throughout the Commonwealth and the efforts to ensure that matters of special concern to women are put on the CPA agenda. I am happy that the CWP is going to have two sessions on very important topics, *viz.* 'Strategies to Overcome Barriers Preventing Women's Participation in Decision-making' and the 'Role of Women Parliamentarians in dealing with HIV/AIDS and Poverty Reduction'. This Conference is thus yet another landmark event in the Commonwealth's endeavour towards women's empowerment.

On the political plane, in many countries, women are under-represented in legislative bodies, in decision-making apparatus, in the governance structures, and even in the higher levels of political party leaderships. Economically, they continue to suffer from deprivation and iniquity, in spite of their contribution to economic growth and greater productivity. Their health care is another distressing area, with poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and

exploitation of varied forms haunting them unendingly. All these call for concerted action at gender mainstreaming of all our socio-economic and political policies and programmes in which women parliamentarians can play a pivotal role.

As regards the barriers preventing women's equal participation in decision-making, we need to emphasize not only on the imperative of creating a conducive legislative regime, but also on appropriate enabling conditions and finally a change in our mental and societal outlook to the whole issue. Our mind-set and outlook towards women's role in the family, society and polity have to undergo a paradigm shift if they are to be made part and parcel of the decision-making processes. In this context, it is worthwhile to recall that the Beijing Declaration emphasized the need of the removal of the obstacles to women's full participation in public life and decision-making, at all levels, including the family.

Women's participation in the decision-making process, however, should also extend to other spheres of governance and the Legislature. The very idea of representation is incomplete, if women who constitute about half the population do not take part in the decision-making or political processes. Although, of late, there has been a perceptible improvement in the participation and representation of women in the decision-making process, it still falls short of the Commonwealth target requiring that at least 30 per cent of those in political and decision making positions should be women. As elected representatives of the people, we parliamentarians, have to seriously introspect how we can facilitate more innovative policies and programmes so as to empower women and involve them in the decision-making process.

Affirmative action and by reserving and earmarking seats for women in the Legislatures is one way through which we can involve women in the political process. In India, under the Constitution's 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts, 33 per cent of seats have been reserved for women in our Panchayati Raj Institutions at the grass roots level of democracy. It is indeed a great achievement that nearly one million women have been elected to our Panchayati Raj Institutions constituting some 37 per cent of all those elected to these local bodies. Encouraged by this, we are looking at a legislation to provide for reservation of seats for women in our Legislatures, both at the State level and at the Center. We are optimistic that we will be able to arrive at a political consensus to bring in the legislation in the near future.

As parliamentarians, we must emphasize on an overall gender-sensitive policy, advocacy and monitoring. We need to proactively address the concerns of gender deficit and to create conditions conducive for facilitating gender equality. In this onerous task, political parties in particular, have an important role to play in encouraging greater partnership between men and women in the party mechanism, electoral process and leadership training.

The second topic for discussion is the 'Role of Women Parliamentarians in dealing with HIV/AIDS, and Poverty Reduction'. I recall that the Parliament of India had hosted a CPA Study Group in January-February 2005 on the 'Role of Parliamentarians in Combating the HIV/AIDS Pandemic'. As the Study Group Report pointed out, no country, developed or developing, can ignore the ill-effects of HIV/AIDS on the global economy and society.

Poverty and gender inequalities are driving factors in the spread of HIV/AIDS and the Commonwealth's Gender Equality Programme (Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015) emphasizes the need for bringing together gender analysis, mainstreaming methods and a multi-sectoral approach in HIV/AIDS interventions. This mandate of the Commonwealth places on us a heavy responsibility. Where poverty is endemic, where illiteracy prevails, where health care facilities are inadequate or unavailable, there is every chance of the dreaded disease rearing its head. That being so, eradicating poverty and ensuring access to education and health-care can go a long way in checking the spread of HIV/AIDS. Women parliamentarians would do well to address these issues in a holistic and concerted manner, as combating poverty and empowering women will help considerably to combat HIV/AIDS.

We, parliamentarians, especially the women parliamentarians, can also play a vital role in creating awareness and helping to remove the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS patients and in mobilizing the governmental agencies and civil society groups in dealing with the problem. First and foremost, we shall ensure that those affected by HIV/AIDS should not be stigmatized or ostracized. We should also seek to ensure formulation of policies and programmes that are sensitive to the needs of those suffering from HIV/AIDS and assist in the proper implementation of these programmes and for raising resources to support and enhance effective HIV/AIDS control programmes. As parliamentarians, we can also play a proactive role by motivating women to initiate and organize self-help groups which, I am sure, will go a long way in economic empowerment which, in turn, will also save them from poverty and the terrible consequences of HIV/AIDS.

Considering the gravity of the problem, it is imperative to redouble our efforts to eradicate poverty and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS as also to sustain the progress achieved in combating it. Special emphasis will have to be laid on an effective health-care system targeted at women, which is presently lacking in many countries. A problem of such grave proportions can only be tackled with the active involvement of the various agencies of the Government, the elected representatives, especially women legislators, local self-government institutions, the media, the educational institutions, the civil society groups, and the people at large.

The two subjects which will be deleberated in this Conference are closely interlinked. Gender justice demands that the political, economic and social aspects of policy prescriptions should undergo a paradigm shift if genuine empowerment is to be secured. We also have to lay sharper focus on national and international policies in this regard so as to build a gender-just and gender-equitable society. I hope that the deliberations at the Conference on these important themes will not only be meaningful but also throw up stimulating ideas for a plan of action for the empowerment of women in all its manifestations and to help the world and women in particular overcome the malaise of poverty and HIV/AIDS.

According to an African proverb, it is women who uphold 'half the sky', by their contribution in different spheres of life, which unfortunately goes both unrecorded and unacknowledged. Let us, today, acknowledge and applaud the silent and determined efforts of millions of women the world over, who continue tirelessly to attend to basic needs which underpin the success of all developmental efforts. I compliment the CWP on their varied efforts in this regard and wish them all success in all their endeavours.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Conference.

Thank you.

GENERATING GROWTH THROUGH EXPORT PROMOTION*

I am happy to be present at the inaugural ceremony of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Chemicals and Allied Products Export Promotion Council (CAPEXIL). The Council, which has the assigned task to promote India's exports has earned appreciation for its role as an effective body which has been articulating the interest of Indian business, both inside and outside the country.

India has emerged as a vibrant nation, a preferred economic partner, one of the richest sources of knowledge and information technology and above all, a vibrant democracy. We are all privileged to be a part of the strong and growing India.

Friends, the adoption of new economic policies and programmes has given impetus to India's economic growth, which is also helping us to play an important role on the global political and economic stage. But the rate of our long-term growth would significantly depend upon the initiatives, interests and cooperation of organizations like the CAPEXIL, established to promote our economic interests worldwide, and to help provide the necessary boost to Indian industry looking beyond domestic frontiers for markets. Exports have an important role as the engine of growth. It is, therefore, imperative for us to focus on the export trade as it increases the range and quality of options available to consumers and motivates local producers to improve the quality of their products in order to compete in the international market.

I reckon that the new five-year foreign trade policy regime announced by our Minister of Commerce and Industry, Shri Kamal Nath in 2004, has provided substantial impetus in the sphere of exports. Since then, I understand, India's merchandise exports have almost doubled and the country's share of World Trade has increased substantially. I am told that this surge in export growth has created an additional 75 lakh jobs. This, no doubt, is an impressive achievement.

Today, as I understand, besides exporting highly skilled manpower, handlooms, handicrafts, gems and Jewellery, information technology and high-

* At the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Chemicals and Allied Products Export Promotion Council (CAPEXIL), New Delhi (1 October 2007).

tech products, the country is making its presence felt in chemical exports also.

Overseeing exports of the widely different product groups that the CAPEXIL deals with and also promoting their exports is by no means an easy task. But the CAPEXIL can claim to have performed the arduous task satisfactorily. Exports of products dealt with by the CAPEXIL have increased quite impressively over the years, accounting for about 10 per cent of our total exports.

For efficient management and promotion of export, one needs to identify potential markets, overcome operational constraints and introduce latest technology at par with changes in other parts of the world. CAPEXIL should take the exporters' concerns to the notice of the Government for effectively accommodating them into the policy framework.

The CAPEXIL's endeavour in exposing our exporters to new technologies in respect of various export products and about methods of improving and diversifying their product-base through Conferences and Seminars are all commendable initiatives. Promoting Indian goods among foreign buyers through invitations, are no doubt helping the Indian exporters. Its service for disseminating information on market and policy to exporters through its journals is an appreciable initiative. The fact that CAPEXIL has been receiving the *Niryat Bandhu* trophy of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations successively for the past few years, speaks about its popularity among the exporters and the people connected with the export promotion.

Since our economy is integrated with the world economy and the Government is providing impetus for exports, it is with quality, reliability and relative technological edge, the products of our country should have competitive advantage over several others and there should be constant endeavour by our exporters to assure highest quality of the products and the timely and sincere implementation of the agreements they enter into. I am happy to note that the CAPEXIL is suitably accommodating environmental technology, employment generation and poverty alleviation in its agenda.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that the tremendous efforts put in by our Minister have borne fruits. The country gratefully appreciates his efforts to protect our interest in the global trading environment. His Ministry's programme to give impetus to exports of high-tech products is extremely encouraging. Measures like simplification of procedures attempted through fine tuning of existing practices under various schemes for transparency, accountability and reducing transaction time, and taking other steps would definitely help to create a better enabling environment for enhancing our export potential.

With these words, I extend my heartiest congratulations to the CAPEXIL and all its members on their Golden Jubilee Celebrations which is itself a landmark event and wish them all success in their continuing ventures. I also take this opportunity to convey my greetings to all those who have received awards today for their distinguished contribution in the field of export promotion of our country.

Thank you.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION*

It gives me immense pleasure to be amidst you all on the occasion of the inauguration of the First National Convention of the All India Federation of University Officers' Association. I thank the organizers for having accorded me this opportunity to be with you here, on this very special occasion.

Higher education has made significant contributions to economic development, social progress and enlightenment of our country. While helping to provide the base for the creation of a knowledge-driven society and creating opportunities for the people for enjoying better quality of living, it has been an important factor in reinforcing the edifice of democracy in our country. Consolidation of democracy in the country would not have been possible without our higher education system.

It is pointed out by many that higher education in India today is afflicted by a deep crisis. The proportion of our population, in the age group of 18 to 24, that enters the world of higher education, is around 7 per cent, which is only one-half the average for Asia. As such, the opportunities for higher education, the need for larger number of institutions and the quality of education offered in those institutions assume great importance. The system of higher education in India is faced with serious challenges and needs a systemic overhaul, so that we can educate much larger number without diluting academic standards. This is crucially important because the transformation of the economy and society in the twenty-first century would depend, to a great extent, on the spread and the quality of education among our people.

The issues affecting higher education in our country today include massive demand for enrolments, unmatched public expenditure, growing tendency for private and commercial institutions to enter the arena and, above all, a widening gap between supply and demand. There is, however, evidence of growing international convergence on higher education policies being initiated by the national governments. The influence of globalization on national regulatory bodies is also discernible.

* At the inauguration of the First National Convention of the All India Federation of University Officers' Association, Kolkata (9 December 2007).

The administrative segment of our university system plays very important role in shaping the quality and content of higher education in the country. They are important pillars around which our university system is established. As such, they contribute greatly in running any university system, in upholding its mission and vision, and in managing its day-to-day activities. A good quality higher education system can be sustained only with an efficient and effective administration to support it. It is incumbent upon the policy-makers to recognize the role of the university officers and to accord to them a proper status in terms of pay and other service benefits. It will go a long way in attracting and retaining meritorious and talented people in university administration in the best interest of maintaining the university system in the country and meeting the challenges before the higher education sector in the 21st Century.

In spite of the key role played by these officers, if we review the growth of higher education in India in the post-Independence period, we will find that the management or governance of the higher education institutions has not received the attention it deserves. The policy-makers at the Central and State Governments have laid emphasis on various sectors of higher education, namely, expansion of facilities by setting up new institutions, inputs of faculty and other human resources, physical infrastructure, curricular designs, affirmative actions like reservation in admission, equity and access, increase of enrolment index, role of private sector, public-private partnership, vocationalisation of curricula, R&D initiatives, etc. But a close scrutiny of the scenario will reveal that the issues relating to efficient management and implementation of modern concepts of governance have not received adequate attention. In this background, it is a commendable initiative that the university officers in the State of West Bengal have taken the lead in forming an All India Federation of University Officers' Association. This, I hope, will enable them to pursue their professional demands like pay parity with teachers as also to fulfil their social commitment as integrated parts of our higher education system.

As we all are aware, in the era of liberalization and globalization, the universities the world over are being forced to modify their roles and commitments. On the one hand, many of them in the developing countries are facing acute financial crises and are devising ways and means to survive against all odds, and on the other, we all are painfully aware that, in India, a major part of our population, especially the dalits and other disadvantaged sections, cannot hope to come to receive the benefit of quality education in the absence of state-funded institutions of higher learning. Besides, in the fast-changing world today, there are certain spheres of knowledge and scholarship, particularly the humanities and mainstream natural sciences, that require additional care and support. Contemporary courses, academic

disciplines and professional skills must be incorporated within the University system to cater to the society's requirements, without totally ignoring the domains of traditional knowledge. We can ignore such streams of study only at the risk of creating a vacuum in the world of learning and undermining the balanced growth of society itself. I am sure that this Association will focus its attention on all these aspects of higher education in the country.

With a united forum like the Federation, which has been formed, the university administration system would be able to evolve a national vision in addressing the challenges before the higher education system in the country. While pursuing your service and career-related agenda, you should also be concerned about the problems the student community face on account of lack of proper co-ordination between the nearly 400 strong universities within the country. We come across numerous instances where students are unable to secure admissions in universities of their choice or being unable to retain the *ad hoc* admissions that many secure, because of the lack of synchronization in the examination schedules and inordinate delay in the announcement of results in our universities. Thousands of students suffer for no fault of theirs. As administrators of the university system in our country, you all should take on the responsibility to correct this major lacuna in our system.

The initiative for overhauling the administrative structure of the universities should also come from within your Federation itself. It should be made more result-oriented and reflect modern professional work-culture. If we are to serve the nation and fulfil our obligations in substantial measure, we need to change with the times. I trust that the All India Federation of University Officers' Association would be able to help to resolve the crisis in the field of higher education by finding ways and creating a new role for our universities in the years ahead.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the First National Convention of the All India Federation of University Officers' Association.

Thank you.

ROLE OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN ENSURING SECURITY AND JUSTICE FOR WOMEN*

I am extremely thankful to Dr. T. Kumar for asking me to launch two significant books today – *Community and Nation: Essays on Identity and Politics in Eastern India* and *Civil Disobedience Movement in Bihar* – authored by the eminent Historian, Prof. Papiya Ghosh. These books are based on several years of painstaking and meticulous research work of a pioneering nature by one of our most eminent academicians. I take this opportunity to join you in paying my tributes to Prof. Ghosh and placing on record my appreciation of her enduring academic attainments and contributions, which are recognized nationally and internationally. The devoted efforts of her family and well wishers in putting together her works in the form of posthumous publications deserve the commendation from all the discerning members of the community. Apart from these two books, I understand more of her original research works will also be published, which unfortunately remained incomplete because of tragic circumstances. It is indeed an irreparable loss of an outstanding professional. The quest for justice in Prof. Ghosh's case deserves everyone's fullest support and I feel it was my duty to lend all support to the family's effort to get the culprits apprehended and punished. I am hopeful that the perpetrators of this gravest of grave crime will be meted deterrent punishment at the earliest. Until this is done, the State, its machinery and society, should seriously continue all efforts, so that the people may be convinced that all are concerned for providing security and justice to women.

Today is 'International Women's Day'. The Day is marked in many different ways. Some commemorations are celebratory, as they should be. The Government of India's theme is 'ANANYA – Survival to Success'. To me, the Day is most appropriate for reflection and introspection. It is a Day to assess the ground reality with objectivity and resolve to work to effect change and positive transformation and remove some of the persistent blots that remain on our collective conscience.

I believe the subject *'Role of Democratic Institutions in Ensuring Security and Justice for Women'* needs to be adequately highlighted. I am convinced

* At the function to mark the International Women's Day and release of the Books *Community and Nation: Essays on Identity and Politics in Eastern India* and *Civil Disobedience Movement in Bihar*, New Delhi (8 March 2008).

that the democratic system of governance provides the best guarantee for a gender-just society. To my mind – all its infirmities notwithstanding – there is no alternative to democracy. I am not aware that any alternative to it has at all been mooted. Democratic institutions embody the sovereign will of the people and it is the sacred duty of all elected representatives to ensure fulfilment of their rights and aspirations, especially women's rights, as they constitute half the population.

Ours is an ancient, complex, multi-tiered, social fabric. Cultural norms, customs, traditions and religions intertwine to play key roles in determining the status of women, which though not homogenous, is definitely not at par with men. Against this backdrop, our Constitution provides for gender equality and empowers the State to take affirmative action to correct the unacceptable imbalance. Articles 14, 15 are very important, as also Article 51A(e) which enjoins as a Fundamental Duty to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. In pursuance of these cardinal provisions many vital legislations have been enacted, programmes have been launched and policies put in place by successive Governments to craft a new social order in a vibrant Independent India, free of prejudices and violence, where women have equal access to opportunities and are enabled to live lives of dignity and achievement. I do not intend to go into details, but will mention a few of them which are considered more significant. These relate to the landmark National Report on the Status of Women in India in 1975, signing the UN's Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, in 1980, constitution of the National Commission for Women in 1992, 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution reserving 33.3 per cent of seats, including the Chairpersonships, for women in all tiers of rural and urban local bodies in 1992, adoption of the National Policy on the Empowerment of Women in 2001, introduction of Gender Budgeting in 2004, enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2005 and Protection from Sexual Harassment of Women Bill as well as the creation of a full-fledged Ministry for Women and Child Development in 2006.

There is general unanimity that these have had an overall positive impact. Women have made impressive strides in all sectors, including in those sectors, which were previously thought to be the exclusive domain of men. However, we must be realistic and accept that six decades into Independence, the situation is far from ideal and the challenges faced by women in actualizing the constitutional provisions continue to be daunting. I wish to bring into focus today some stark facts and trends which have a bearing on women's security and justice. These leave me and – I am sure – all concerned citizens, greatly distressed. I would like to share some of my thoughts on what more should be done by democratic institutions to address these grim challenges in a suitable manner so that the results are tangible and actually experienced by women in their day-to-day lives.

In our country, gender disparity in education, substantially weakens the democratic fabric of our country. According to the Planning Commission's National Human Development Report, 2001, the gender empowerment index was just 67.6 per cent in the early 90s, implying that women trailed by a third in human development indicators. Not that we need data to bring home what is an everyday reality, but there are many States where gender indicators are extremely unsatisfactory. Such gender disparity is directly linked with gender inequality at the level of family and society. No doubt, the educational empowerment of our female population finds expression in the legal as well as programmatic framework of our national endeavour. Our Constitution is committed to providing full and compulsory education to all up to the age of 14 years irrespective of gender. The 86th Constitution Amendment Act, 2002 has made elementary education a Fundamental Right for all children in the age-group of 6 to 14 years. This apart, the National Policy on Education, 1986 and the Programme of Action, 1992 are the other guiding documents that focus on various aspects of women's educational empowerment. But unfortunately, the female literacy rate in our country is still strikingly lower than that of men.

Steps will have to be taken to ensure gender-parity in education by educating the families and communities about the benefits of girls' education by providing incentives to enroll and retain the girls in schools. If we fail to overcome the obstacles to education, particularly in the case of women, a major portion of our population will be prevented from exercising their human rights. Removing the factors that hinder the full participation of women in the various spheres of society is, therefore, a very important concomitant towards the empowerment of our women, for which all democratic institutions must endeavour with sincerity and commitment.

There has to be a symbiotic link between the importance of economic empowerment of women and the opening up of wider political spaces for them. The appreciation of this link will provide tremendous opportunities of self-expression and realization of women's inherent potential, not only, to their own but also to the larger benefit of the family, society and the country. Education has the tremendous possibility of creating awareness about the options available and preparing women for suitable avenues of economic autonomy and independence.

We must also consider the shameful saga of 'the missing millions' of girl-children. The prospects of sheer survival – I repeat sheer survival – of girl children today are extremely bleak. Alarms from different quarters have been raised over the years about the sex-ratio, which has declined from 976 in 1961 to 927 in 2001. As the third National Family Health Survey reveals, the situation has, in fact, deteriorated over the last few years. The heinous crimes of female

foeticide and female infanticide continue unchecked. The old perception that it is poverty that primarily drives families to these crimes has long since been abandoned. The sex-ratio is extremely poor in some of the economically better-off States like Punjab and Haryana. Notwithstanding the Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, many ways have been found, with the collusion of medical professionals, to circumvent the law. Even if the girl-child is allowed to survive, she faces innumerable impediments at every step which hinder her growth and development. I feel that it is repugnant to a civilized society that the State has to offer cash incentives to parents to let their daughters come into this world and provide them with care and educate them to adulthood. But perhaps desperate situations demand desperate measures.

There are despicable crimes like those committed in the Nithari Village of Uttar Pradesh of large scale sexual abuse, rape and murder of girl-children. There is a growing incidence of trafficking for prostitution and it is estimated that as many as 40 per cent of the sex workers are children. The National Crime Records Bureau's *Crime in India, 2006*, contains a large amount of shocking data that calls for serious study. There is an increase in major crimes against women especially rape, kidnap, abduction, domestic violence and dowry cases. According to a recent BBC Survey, there are 53 rapes a day in India and it is the fastest growing crime. Delhi, the National Capital, has the highest crime rate against women.

As these trends make amply clear, insecurity is a constant and life-long companion for girls and women. Sadly, even within their own homes and in some institutions set up for their education, care and well-being by the Government and non-governmental organizations, they are often not safe. Security is a very major concern and this severely restricts their space, options, opportunities, choices and decisions. The adverse impact, over the long-term, is colossal, but it remains to be properly appreciated. It is not an overstatement that women do not have control of their lives and are viewed through the lens of a patriarchal society as 'dispensable commodities'. A prime example of this is the scourge of child marriage, which after more than seven decades of enactment of preventive legislation, still has social sanction. It is girls and women who suffer more as they already have multiple disadvantages stacked against them, ranging from marked malnutrition, poor access to health and lack of education. They are forced into hazardous occupations in unimaginably poor working conditions and denied participation in decision-making processes. They are worst hit in instances of communal disturbances, internal displacement, natural disasters and migration. The list goes on and on. These perpetuate the vicious cycle of continuing discrimination and violation of entitlements. Economic marginalization compounds their problems manifold.

The situation is nothing short of 'rights-denial' for a vast majority girl-children and women in our country. What makes the situation most disquieting is that we are obviously not doing all that it takes to bring about a radical change. The reasons and the analyses thereof primarily underscore the major 'disconnect' between an inherently hierarchical and unequal social reality and an equality-driven polity as well as the underperformance of State instrumentalities, in particular the Executive. Poor implementation and tardy law-enforcement are the familiar 'villains'. But we need to broaden the scope of analysis. Notwithstanding some highly praiseworthy interventions in this regard, the role of the Judiciary is not adequately debated in the manner it should be. Judicial processes and systems must also be held accountable for the unsatisfactory situation of women, impacting their security and equity. We must feel deep concern about low levels of legal literacy, lack of access by women to institutions of justice, its high cost and how they undermine the constitutionally and legally guaranteed status of women. Women have rights as litigants and victims and often these are not adequately safeguarded. But I will not dwell on this more now as my views are fairly well known.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is sufficient to say that credibility and respect of the people for the institutions of governance and State are of utmost importance. I would like to emphasize that I am not excluding democratic institutions from scrutiny which has to be done in a holistic manner. Thus, in a self-critical mode, we should do a stock-taking of the role of democratic institutions in ensuring security and justice for women.

It is an extremely sad day for me to publicly acknowledge that the reputation of democratic institutions in our country is perhaps at an all-time low today. Devaluation of conventional parliamentary norms, disruptions, disorder and disrespect for the Chair have led to widespread cynicism. In a fractious environment of sterile, confrontational politics, we seem to have lost sight of crucial national agendas. Of these, I have no hesitation in stating that women's rights, their security and justice should be among the most important priorities. Considerable time is lost in Parliament due to disruptions, having gone up from 5 per cent in the 11th Lok Sabha to 21 per cent in the present one. I am sorry to say that women's issues and concerns barely find reflection in the House proceedings. I do not observe any concerted articulation of outrage and condemnation when there are instances of violations of women's rights and security. I do admit that many of these are related to States and they cannot be discussed in Parliament but I am referring more to a studied apathy that is discernible. Women of the country have a right to know how their status can improve through the pro-active intervention of democratic institutions and why this is not happening. Why have democratic institutions failed to deliver in this regard? A role redefinition in this specific context, is perhaps called for, in the circumstances and there can be no better

day than today – the International Women's Day – to attempt it. The first step, in this direction lies in enhancing gender participation in all democratic institutions at the State and National levels. Women are grossly under-represented at the State and National level and I find it embarrassing to even quote the dismal figure of 8 per cent in Parliament. The picture is not very different at the State level. In some States like Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland, where women outnumber male voters, there are no women legislators! Kerala has only 7 out of 140 legislators, in spite of having the highest literacy levels. As you have correctly gauged, I am referring to the elusive Women's Reservation Bill which has been sidelined on some ground or the other for over a decade now. Every Session I hear that the Bill will be moved and it is my dream that during my tenure the Bill will be passed by Parliament. As a staunch supporter of the Bill all through, I am convinced that it will be the single most powerful catalyst in ensuring equity and justice for women in the country.

A very healthy result of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments is that millions of women have, at the grass root levels, been brought into the political mainstream. Their roles and society's perceptions of their capabilities have undergone fundamental transformation. This should be widely applauded and acclaimed and put to rest once and for all, apprehensions and concerns, many of which are totally baseless. I call this unique and inspirational. On all my overseas visits as Speaker, I always cite this as one of India's singular achievements, in addition to our economic prowess and knowledge power and project it as a model for other countries. We are the world's largest functioning democracy and an engendered one at the cutting edge, which is indeed remarkable!

Till such time as the historic Bill is passed, some initiatives have been taken in the 14th Lok Sabha to get over the 'apathy-factor', if I may call it so. During this period various Parliamentary Forums have been set up to bring certain critical problems centre-stage. One of these is the Forum on Children and I am happy that it has ignited much interest amongst the members to know more about problems confronted by girl-children. Experts are called in by the Forum to get deeper insights so that deliberations on the floor of the House may be more illuminating and result-oriented.

As you know, we have the system of the Departmentally Related Standing Committees and Consultative Committees. These generally function in a consensual manner. As Chairman of several Parliamentary Committees, for nearly four decades in Parliament, I can vouch for the fact that serious deliberations are held in these Committees. There is also a Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women. After going through their Reports, I find that much worthwhile work is being done by the Committees.

As the media has its own priorities and unfortunately provides inadequate space to Parliament's functioning, other than those relating to bedlam and unruly behaviour – we have in Parliament, during the 14th Lok Sabha, set up the LSTV Channel to extend the Visitors' Gallery to the whole country. Now women can judge for themselves what their representatives are doing to promote their cause. So far I have not succeeded in opening the Committee proceedings to the media but I believe in total transparency and the day is not far off when this will also come through. I may inform you that the LSTV has regular Programmes on women's issues. 'Gender Discourse' is one of the most popular of its programmes and it sensitizes and motivates parliamentarians about sensitive social issues.

It is a matter of great sorrow as well as concern that democratic institutions have not measured up to the expectations of women. It is time to think and strategize more innovatively to build the right synergies so that trust in the efficacy of the institutions is restored. I believe that parliamentarians should also work more closely with media, civil society organizations, activists, expert institutions and the women's movement.

It is therefore imperative to set our House in order. All these will remain pious intentions and rhetoric if the people, whose servants we are, cannot look up to us for inspiration and guidance. This implies improvement in our functioning and overall performance. The Government of the day should not be spared in the Parliament or the Assemblies, if it is found wanting in dealing with activities which result in 'denial of rights' of women. More searching questions should be asked, more Motions moved, more critical analyses of the efficacy and gender-sensitivity of Laws, Programmes and Policies and even Ministerial Budgets taken up by Members and Committees. I hope in the current Budget Session itself when Committees will examine Demands for Grants of Ministries they will discuss gender based issues. I learnt from the Finance Minister's Speech in the House that fifty four Ministries have Gender Budgeting Cells. I was also heartened to note that there are two Private Members' Bills this Session, pertaining to the problems of women and girl-children – Prevention of Female Infanticide and Widows' Welfare.

For the first time, a distinguished lady is the Head of State. This should inspire all democrats to make it possible for all women to achieve their true potential, instead of being constrained and restricted due to their unacceptably low social position and constant concerns about lack of security and non-delivery of justice. To my mind, democratic institutions must ensure that women, who hold up more than half the sky, in Chairman Mao's words, can do so in all their full splendour and glory. There must be no democratic deficit on account of the innumerable indignities on girls and women.

Our vision should be that there will be 'zero-tolerance' for discrimination, abuse and violence against women with the ground swell of support, their rights and security will be fully protected and guaranteed. Democratic institutions must take the lead in this crusade. A society and polity that does not ensure girl-children and women their due, face a bleak future indeed. We have a rich legacy to preserve. On the International Women's Day, we must reaffirm once again our full faith in girl-children and women and assure them of a blemish-free future of which we can be justifiably proud. Let us all join hands so that Indian women are best placed and become the envy of their counterparts the world over. This may require a tectonic shift in our thinking and action, but it can be done if the people's will moves in that direction. Once women decide that the time for a dramatic change has come, there can be no stopping the democratic institutions from going along with them.

Thank you.

GOOD NUTRITION: IMPERATIVE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*

I am happy to be here with you all at the Exhibition on Nutrition Awareness being organized by the Food and Nutrition Board of the Ministry of Women and Child Development on the occasion of the International Women's Day being celebrated the world over. The Hon'ble Minister of Women and Child Development, Smt. Renuka Choudhury and her Ministers deserve our compliments for taking the initiative for this Exhibition on an issue, which is of great concern for all of us. I am sure today's Exhibition will help in creating awareness among our people about the importance of nutrition, so that they can collaborate with each other and also with the administration and work for improving nutrition and health of our people.

The importance of nutrition in human resource development, raising the productive capacity of the people and economic growth of a nation should be recognized by all. Studies reveal that various forms of malnutrition manifested like in anaemia and other forms of deficiencies greatly affect the Gross National Product of the countries. Micronutrient deficiencies afflict all age groups and both sexes. The three deficiencies of vitamin A, iron and iodine along with under-nutrition have been impeding India's economic growth significantly. According to an estimate, the cost of treating malnutrition is 27 times more than the investment required for its prevention.

The concept of nutrition is very comprehensive and dynamic which changes with the age and environment. We have to achieve sustainable improvement in nutritional status and nutritional needs should be recognized and addressed as part of overall development policy.

Friends, India has made tremendous progress in various fields like information technology, nuclear and space research and is one of the fastest growing economies of the world. But the nutritional status of our population appears to be worsening according to some important indicators. Although there has been a significant improvement in the nutritional levels of children and adults during the last three decades, the present levels of malnutrition are still unacceptably high. Studies revealed, that nearly 46 per cent of the preschool children are underweight, 79 per cent of children in the age group of 6 to 35 months are anaemic, 0.7 per cent suffer from vitamin A deficiency,

* At the Exhibition to Enhance Nutrition Awareness, organized by the Food and Nutrition Board, Ministry of Women and Child Development, New Delhi (8 March 2008).

and more than 10 per cent suffer from iodine deficiency disorders. Anaemia levels in pregnant and lactating mothers and adolescent girls is a cause of concern.

It is a matter of great concern that in India, a large number of children suffer from malnutrition due to causes like food insecurity, female illiteracy and poor access to health-care and safe drinking water, poor sanitation and poor purchasing power. Widespread poverty resulting in chronic and persistent hunger is the biggest scourge of the developing countries like ours. Undernutrition results from inadequate intake of food and more essential nutrients resulting in deterioration of physical growth and health and affects the capacity to work and productivity amongst adults and enhances mortality and morbidity amongst children.

In achieving good nutrition for all, efforts on the part of Government alone are not enough. In this regard, the role of non-governmental organizations also assumes importance as their networking together with reach is very wide. Public participation in the onerous task of ensuring good nutrition and healthy living can be better achieved through collaboration with civil society organizations.

Friends, to achieve optimum level of nutrition, there should be mass awareness campaigns for social mobilization in the country. At village level, in regional languages, utilizing all available channels and a core nutrition module to be integrated in all training programmes, particularly of women and child development, health and family welfare, education and agriculture, women's groups and panchayats.

It is heartening to learn that the Food and Nutrition Board, since its inception in 1993, more so in recent years, has been playing a pivotal role in highlighting the issue of nutrition through various modes such as by organizing exhibitions, melas, and fairs in different parts of the country with a view to provide information on nutrition related matters among the people. Some of the special programmes organized to celebrate the events, like National Nutrition Week from 1st to 7th September every year, the World Breastfeeding Week from 1st to 7th August, and the Global Iodine Deficiency Disorder Prevention Day on 21 October every year, no doubt, will help in creating awareness among common people on all these vital issues affecting their health. I feel these programmes should be observed particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, and should not be only city-centred. I am sure that this three day nutrition exhibition and the programmes which have been organized including instant nutrition and health check up of women and girls and presentation of cultural programmes focussing on nutrition and health will be very informative and useful. I wish the Food and Nutrition Board all the best in its laudable endeavours in the years ahead.

Thank you.

I am thankful to the Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.B. Shah, President of the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, for his kind invitation to me to inaugurate the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the 'World Consumer Rights Day' and for providing me with an opportunity to share my views on the subject which has a great bearing on the interests of the common people of our country. I am indeed happy that the Judiciary and the Executive together have shown a great deal of concern in ensuring an effective, accountable, expeditious and transparent system of justice concerning consumer rights in the country.

We have moved way ahead since the world observed the first 'World Consumer Rights Day', on 15 March 1983. Within two years of that celebration, the United Nations General Assembly had adopted the guidelines for consumer protection, which delineated the guiding principles of consumer rights, in addition to providing a policy framework for strengthening the national consumer protection policies. One may say that these guidelines have been profoundly enriched by the thoughts of former US President John F. Kennedy who, for the first time in 1962, outlined the four basic consumer rights: the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose and the right to be heard. Recently, four more rights have been added by the consumer movement, namely, the right to satisfaction of basic needs, the right to redress, the right to education and the right to a healthy environment.

The World Consumer Rights Day initiatives, taken up at international, national and local levels, have adopted several methods of organizing special campaigns, press conferences, public exhibitions, workshops, street events, etc. in order to give voice to the concerns of the consumers across the world. These organized institutional efforts have certainly gone a long way in drawing attention to a range of issues like adulterated food-manufacturing, spurious drugs, unethical marketing practices, consumer awareness campaigns, and many more. It is quite heartening that the World Consumer Rights Day has, of late, turned into an annual occasion for celebration and solidarity under the banner of the international consumer movement. It has also espoused the cause of basic consumer rights and their effective compliance.

* Inaugural Address at the Conference of the Presidents of the State Commissions and the Secretaries in-charge of Consumer Affairs of the States/Union Territories on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the 'World Consumer Rights Day', New Delhi (14 March 2008).

Significantly, the theme of this year's 'World Consumer Rights Day' is, *Junk Food Generation – to stop the marketing of unhealthy food to children.* This is quite relevant for us as a vast section of our population are children and there is a discernible craving for such food among them. One of the serious threats looming large over the health of our children, especially the school-bound children, emerges out of their increasing vulnerability to junk-food and all kinds of aerated drinks. What is disconcerting is that these food items which are without their natural ingredients also enhance the calorie intake of the children to harmful proportions.

After Independence, our country has taken commendable steps in protecting the interests of consumers by way of various policies and legislations, in which our Parliament has been a guiding force. The Consumer Protection Act of 1986 represented an important milestone in the history of consumer movement in the country. As you all are aware, the Act provided for the setting up of a three-tier *quasi judicial* consumer dispute redressal mechanism at the National, State and District levels to deal with consumer disputes in the matters of defective goods, deficient services, unfair and restrictive trade practices, over-charging, and hoarding and black marketing, and also to provide simple, speedy and inexpensive redressal for consumer grievances. To supplement these efforts, a pioneering step was taken in 1997 by creating a separate Department of Consumer Affairs in the Central Government to exclusively focus on protecting the rights of the consumers.

In the past few years, several initiatives have been taken by successive Governments to empower the consumers. We have the three-tier quasi-judicial machinery; we have the Central, State and District Consumer Protection Councils; we have also set up a Consumer Welfare Fund for encouraging voluntary consumer organizations and NGOs to strengthen consumer movement in the country, especially in the rural and backward areas. We have also the National Consumer Helpline, a toll free facility, initiated in March 2005, to deal with problems related to defective products, deficiency in services and unfair trade practices, benefiting the consumers. But the moot question, however, is how many people are aware of the existence of these safeguards and legal initiatives and how many are able to actually take advantage of them? This is where an effective awareness campaign assumes importance.

Friends, with the enactment of the 73rd constitutional amendment, the process of governance has reached the grass-roots level and participatory administration has also gained momentum. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), I believe, are the best fora to educate the rural masses about their rights as consumers and of the techniques to redress their grievances in the meetings of the *Gram Sabha,* which are attended by many villagers. That

being so, there is a need to involve the three tiers of PRIs with the consumer welfare initiatives.

I am happy to note that the various consumer fora have disposed of 88.16 per cent cases which were reported to them. Importantly, out of 29,48,348 cases filed since inception, 25,99,342 cases have already been disposed of and now 3,49,006 cases remain pending. This, indeed, is a praiseworthy achievement. However, we should not ignore the fact that consumer courts were set up as an alternate justice delivery system to render quick and inexpensive justice to the consumers within the stipulated time frame.

On the parliamentary plane, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Food, Civil Supplies and Public Distribution have dealt with various issues related to consumer movement in detail. In one of its reports, the Committee has observed that consumer protection has been accorded low priority by several of our State Governments. Only the State of West Bengal is having a full-fledged Department of Consumer Affairs. The Committee felt that since the work of consumer protection requires adequate attention and constant and regular monitoring, a full-fledged Department needs to be put in place in the States for consumer protection.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee, in its Report made in June 2007 on the Consumer Movement in the country, has further observed that in Daman and Diu, not even a single case was filed in the State Commission or District Fora since inception, which may be due to the lack of the people's awareness. Also, in the North-Eastern States and Lakshadweep, the number of cases filed are few and far between indicating that not all complaints are taken to the Consumer Courts there. The Committee also noted that a large number of District Fora were non-functional which defeat the very purpose of the establishment of consumer courts and thus deprive the people of appropriate forums to obtain the protection as well as the remedies offered by the Consumer Protection Act.

The Committee, with a view to keeping a check on the piling of cases of consumer courts, recommended that there should be no vacancy of members in Courts for more than one month. Besides, District Fora are suffering for want of adequate infrastructure and other basic amenities, which acts as a deterrent in the quick disposal of cases, thereby causing pendency of consumer cases. It was also brought to light by the Committee that in remote and far-flung areas, consumers have to come to the district headquarters for filing of cases. Similarly, the State Commissions are located in the respective State capitals. The distance as well as the lack of connectivity deter the consumers from coming to the district headquarters and the State capitals. Besides, the problem of vacancies, various Consumer Fora are also facing the shortage of adequate supporting staff, adequate infrastructure and other basic amenities.

Friends, ours is a vast country with a billion plus population of whom an estimated 26 per cent are living below the poverty line. Because of economic inequality, low level of literacy and ignorance, a large proportion of consumers are not able to assert themselves and get easily exploited by the trade and industry and service providers. The problem has become more acute with the growing culture of consumerism and opening up of the global economic corridors.

We in India, with its rapidly growing economy, have to work towards facilitating an effective, accountable and responsive mechanism to deal with consumers' problems. The Parliamentary Committee in its report on Consumer Movement in the country had recommended, among other things, that the Consumer Protection Councils need to be streamlined so as to ensure justice at the doorsteps of consumers.

Besides, the National Action Plan, which is meant to educate people on various subject matters of consumer interest, as mandated by the Department of Consumer Affairs, needs to be put into effect in right earnest. The existence of the Consumer Grievance Redressal Cells needs to be publicized so that more and more consumers could make full use of this facility. There should be mandatory guidelines to the sellers or providers of service to issue bills, cash memos, receipts, etc. to consumers. Another important step which needs to be taken is to regulate e-transaction, which is unfairly encouraging aggressive marketing and sale of products and services by internet, e-mail, telephone and other means of transaction, thus intruding into the privacy of the hapless consumers. We can also consider setting up a Consumer Product Safety Commission, on the lines of the one in USA, to protect the interest of consumers from various problems, including the menace of counterfeit, spurious and contraband products. Lastly, the Citizens Charter, introduced in 1994 with the objective of providing a clean, effective and responsible administration at all levels with an emphasis on transparency and accountability and enhancing the citizens' entitlement to public services, quality of service, access to information and time-bound redressal of grievances, needs to be given adequate publicity so that the consumers are able to assert their rights much more effectively.

Today, when we are celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the 'World Consumer Rights Day', it is appropriate to recall what Gandhiji said placing the importance of the customer in perspective:

> A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work – he is the purpose of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us the opportunity to serve him.

More than anything else, a vigorous campaign to increase awareness and to enhance the effectiveness of the consumer protection measures is the key to the consumer movement. In this task, the media – print as well as electronic, has a very crucial role in disseminating the policies and programmes of the Government with regard to the consumer rights and, more specially, consumer awareness. The print media, especially the vernacular press which has a very wide readership base among the masses, can effectively connect with the people by highlighting their grievances and redressal measures *vis-a-vis* their consumer rights. Notwithstanding the communication revolution, radio, as the traditional medium of information, education, news and entertainment programmes, still holds its clientele intact, and is quite popular in our rural areas. As recommended by the Parliamentary Committee, wide publicity should be given through electronic media on the lines of the Pulse Polio Campaign to make the consumer awareness programme broad based and more mass oriented.

Friends, with the advent of economic reforms and globalization, our economy has undergone a sea-change, both structurally and functionally. This, in turn, has impacted our services sectors like banking, insurance, medicare, telecommunications and other areas tremendously. As consumer rights are closely intertwined with the services sectors, there is an urgent need to put in place a mechanism whereby we can mitigate the asymmetry between the need for consumer rights protection and the potent threats that could emerge from the new policy changes. In the backdrop of the increasing tilt of the WTO towards the interests of some of the developed countries, even at the cost of free and fair trade practices, we ought to be vigilant enough in safeguarding our people's interests, and in this pursuit, the Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary, the Civil Society and the Media, will have to work in tandem. Ultimately, the objective should be to create conditions for reaffirming the pre-eminence of the consumer and his or her interest both in receiving services and in buying consumables and thereby protect him or her against unfair trade practices. Everyone must be made to recognize the supremacy of the consumer, as Gandhiji defined it.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Conference.

Thank you.

COMPLEXITIES OF GLOBAL WARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE*

On behalf of the Parliament of India, I am greatly honoured to extend a very cordial welcome to Mr. Al Gore, an outstanding statesman of our times, Noble Laureate and former Vice-President of the United States of America. We are thankful to him for agreeing to speak to our members of Parliament on a subject of crucial importance relating to *'Global Warming and Climate Change'*.

We are also happy to have with us another prominent environmental activist and Chairman of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Dr. R.K. Pachauri. I would like to commend both of them for their remarkable contributions in bringing to the centre-stage critical issues, which impact the environment and determine the very future of the planet.

The Parliament of India places on record its profound appreciation of their tireless endeavours in securing and safeguarding the purity of the global environment and the well-being of the mankind.

The Noble Peace Prize last year, awarded jointly to Mr. Al Gore and the IPCC has been the crowning glory after a series of national and international awards for Mr. Gore's untiring efforts, a richly deserved recognition indeed.

The Award was given for the efforts to buildup and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change and to lay the foundation for measures that are needed to counteract such change. The Nobel Committee's citation emphasized that action is necessary now before climate change moves beyond man's control.

It is through Mr. Al Gore's single minded dedication and passionate concern that the global community and global leaders, in particular, were made aware of the seriousness of global warming and its enormous potential for damage. Most appropriately, he termed it 'Inconvenient Truth' and forced attention to what was needed to be done to address it. His brilliant documentary is the result of tremendous amount of work and research, which went into the making of it, which as we all know, won the coveted Oscar.

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* Introductory Remarks at the Address to the members of Parliament on *Global Warming and Climate Change* by Mr. Albert Arnold Gore, BPST, New Delhi (14 March 2008).

Mr. Al Gore, through his varied endeavours, has drawn the attention of the world to the fact that global warming is for real, potentially catastrophic, and human-caused and that the efforts of global warming can be successfully reversed through appropriate actions. As Mr. Al Gore rightly observes, 'the penalties for ignoring this challenge are immense and growing and at some near point would be unsustainable and unrecoverable.' We also have to pay heed to the warning of Dr. Pachauri that 'the challenge before us is not only a large one: it is also one in which every year of delay implies a commitment to greater climate change in the future'. Saving our planet is our shared responsibility and we must strive collectively to achieve this goal.

The world has come to acknowledge, belatedly though, the seriousness and perils of global warming and climate change. It is a grave problem accentuated by some of the most developed nations, as they are called, that confronts the whole of humanity and needs immediate and focused attention of each and every individual, civil society groups, planners and policy makers alike. The Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC on Climate Change predicts that world temperatures could rise between 1.1 and 6.4 degrees Centigrade during the 21st Century, sea level by 18 to 59 cm and an increase in warm spells, heat waves, heavy rainfall, increase in droughts, tropical cyclones and extreme high tides. In the face of such a grave challenge, it is imperative that nations, particularly, the developed ones and also the developing nations pool their efforts and resources to initiate corrective measures on a priority basis.

Needless to say, the economic development of a modern and progressive society will have to be complimented with the sustenance of environment. Coping with climate change, tackling water crisis, preserving forests and biodiversity and green accounting are some of the measures necessary for sustainable development. In our country, we have a full-fledged Ministry of Environment and Forests and also a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment and Forests. There is also the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, with representation of key Ministries, experts, industry and media to guide the integration of climate change in national development.

The Indian Parliament too takes global warming and climate change with utmost seriousness, conscious that it has a major and important role to play in reversing the present trend. I would like to inform this distinguished gathering with pride that we had one of the best debate in Lok Sabha on the subject last year which was telecast on the Lok Sabha TV Channel, the only one of its kind in the world to be setup and operated by Parliament. I have finalized the constitution of the Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change to build on the interest that has been generated to enable parliamentarians to contribute more meaningfully in this regard.

Today is an occasion to obtain a deeper appreciation of the many facets and complexities of global warming and climate change. This will be a unique interaction and I am confident that we will all gain enormously from the erudition and rich experience of our most distinguished Guest Speakers.

I warmly compliment the Convenor of the Parliamentary Forum on Youth, Shri Naveen Jindal, and our Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training on facilitating this Address by Mr. Al Gore and Dr. R.K. Pachauri to the members of the Indian Parliament.

Thank you.

CLIMATE CHANGE: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA*

I have great pleasure in joining you all in welcoming Dr. R.K. Pachauri who has very kindly agreed to speak to us on the very important subject of *Climate Change: Implications for India*. Dr. Pachauri needs no introduction. His commendable contributions and his sustained and tireless efforts to halt, rather reverse climate change, have received global recognition. He has provided enlightened leadership to the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in creating a global awareness about the serious effects of climate change and in producing a tremendous wealth of scientific material and data of great relevance to policy makers to deal with this complex problem. We had an opportunity to hear him, last month along with Mr. Al Gore, and we are thankful to him for his ready consent to spare some time today to address the members when we requested him, as they must be more pro-active in this matter and raise the issues in the House also.

The catastrophic consequences of global warming are now well-known. The grave problem that confronts the whole of humanity, requires urgent individual and collective human efforts to deal with the same. The Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC on Climate Change pointed out that 'warming of the climate system is unequivocal', and 'most of the global average warming over the past 50 years is very likely due to anthropogenic greenhouse gases increases' and will affect all countries but its impact will be particularly severe on countries that are poor and lack the capacity to limit the deleterious impact of climate change. Many findings make the worrisome prediction that the effects of climate change will affect millions of people in India in different ways, putting enormous pressure on our efforts to achieve a higher growth rate for the benefit of our teeming masses.

It is, therefore, imperative that we take tangible steps and synergise our efforts, policies and programmes to make development sustainable. The Ministry of Environment and Forests have taken some measures to promote sustainable development. The Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change is actively involved in shaping the integration of climate change in our national development. At the parliamentary level, we have the parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology and Environment and Forests.

* Introductory Remarks at the Lecture by Dr. R.K. Pachauri on *Climate Change: Implications for India*, BPST, New Delhi (25 April 2008).

We have also set up Parliamentary Forums on crucial areas of topical interest, including a Forum on Water Conservation and Management. A Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change is also being constituted, considering the serious implications of climate change.

The effects of global warming can be disastrous; only a systematic, coordinated and collective effort by the global community can limit the adverse impacts of climate change. As Dr. Pachauri has stressed time and again, 'the challenge before us is not only a large one, it is also one in which every year of delay implies a commitment to greater climate change in the future'. Saving our Earth is our shared responsibility, a commitment we must meet for the safety and well-being of future generations.

I am sure this Address by Dr. R.K. Pachauri, organised by the BPST, will be found extremely useful and stimulating by all and I once again convey my sincere thanks to him for the trouble he has taken to be here and speak to us.

Thank you.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IN THE NORTH EASTERN REGION*

I am extremely happy to be with you here today on the occasion of the 11th Conference of the North-East Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I heartily felicitate the North-East Region CPA for having organized this Conference at Aizawl. Mizoram is not only endowed with a rich culture and history but is also known for its scenic beauty. That apart, Mizoram is a peaceful State and has made impressive socio-economic progress.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has within its fold a large number of National, State, Provincial and Territorial Parliaments and Legislatures. Three years from now, the Association will be completing 100 years of its eventful existence. During its long and chequered history, the CPA has played a key role in upholding Parliamentary democracy and made rich contributions towards promoting cooperation among its member-countries. Through its endeavours, Parliaments and peoples of the Commonwealth from diverse backgrounds, have forged close links and mutually benefited in various areas related to governance with a positive impact on development, peace and harmony.

I am happy that the North-East Region CPA, as part of the CPA family, has been working assiduously in furthering the aims and mission of the Association. It has held regular meetings to deliberate upon issues of common concern, thereby fostering democratic values and better understanding amongst its constituent Members.

As you are aware, the North-Eastern Region occupies a unique and distinctive position in the socio-cultural and geo-political landscape of the country. Surrounded by five countries, the Region has enormous strategic and economic importance. Government policies and Programmes have been drawn up keeping this significant facet in view.

The North-East Region holds tremendous potential for socio-economic development. It is richly endowed with natural resources, ranging from mineral wealth to water resources to forests and has a favourable agro-climatic conditions. In spite of many obstacles and problems, the Region has registered

* Inaugural Address at the 11th North-East Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (NERCPA) Conference, Aizawl, Mizoram (28 May 2008).

impressive performance. Amongst these figure the achievement of higher literacy rates and higher women's work participation rate compared to the all-India average. The high social status accorded to women is yet another remarkable and praiseworthy feature of the Region. However, the stark reality is that underdevelopment has persisted. This and other socio-cultural and ethnic complex problems which have not been satisfactorily resolved have engendered an unsettled situation in many parts of the Region, leading to the scourge of insurgency. The per capita gross state domestic product of the Region is low. The Region's share of road and rail networks, as well as power availability is below the national average. However, its literacy rate is higher than the national average, which is a matter of pride for the whole Region and the country as a whole.

For proper and balanced development of the Region amongst other priorities, the Region needs to realize its full potential and create an environment that is conducive to investment, both public and private. What is vitally needed is increasing people's participation at the grassroots level and strengthening capacity building of the people and of democratic Institutions. Durable peace and prosperity will follow the people's active participation in the decision-making process. It is incumbent upon the people's representatives at all levels to ensure that governance is accountable, transparent, responsible and responsive to the peoples' issues and demands.

This is not to paint a negative scenario of the Region. Successive Governments have taken various noteworthy measures to bring peace and development to the Region. The constitution of the North-Eastern Council in 1971 represented a major initiative in this direction. The Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region (DONER) was set up in 2001 and has the mandate to look into the holistic and comprehensive socio-economic development of the Region. The Region receives special attention to expedite its balanced development. I understand that a new Indian Institute of Management (IIM) at Shillong will become functional from 2008-09 session onwards. It is indeed a matter of great satisfaction for the whole of North-East that Guwahati has been selected to house one of the 14 world class Universities to be established during the 11th Plan period. I have no manner of doubt that sooner rather than later, the North-Eastern States will play a much larger role than today in national affairs by their steady progress and development.

I am happy that the NERCPA has an important role in fostering ties within Region, over the years and focused attention on issues that are of vital concern to the well-being of the people of the Region. The Agenda of this Conference has, I find, important subjects *i.e.* – 'Budgetary Process – Performance Budget' and 'Time Management for Promoting Efficiency in the

Activities of the Legislatures'. Budgetary process is one through which the Demands for Grants of the various Ministries are discussed and voted by the Legislature, enabling the popularly elected body to scrutinize the budget proposals closely and also to enforce accountability. The Performance Budget enables the evaluation and assessment of performance against the broad objectives of public policy and programmes adopted by the Government. It greatly helps in improving effectiveness and bringing efficiency into the functioning of various Ministries and Departments.

Performance budget prepared by each Ministry or Department of the Government enables the Legislature to oversee whether the money allocated for a particular programme is being utilized in the best possible manner to yield the planned targets. The presentation of Performance Budget has been made mandatory for all Ministries of the Central Government from the financial year 2005-06 onwards.

As you are aware, Parliament enjoys autonomy in its financial matters. The annual budget estimates of the Parliament of India are not subjected to examination by the Executive and are incorporated in the Union Budget. The budget is voted by Parliament with no sanctions exercised by the Executive, and no cut motion or discussion relating to the Budget of the two Houses and their Secretariats is allowed. However, what is of great importance is that the elected bodies like the Parliament and Assemblies as well as Members should maintain high standards of accountability and transparency in all matters of functioning, including financial matters. Whatever money is spent on Legislature and its Members are drawn from the public funds and only to facilitate their functioning as ordained in the Constitution and, therefore, it is contingent upon them to bring in transparency in all their financial arrangements. Like all other public bodies and institutions, Legislative bodies should observe public accountability in all their affairs, including financial matters. The CPA has also been highlighting the importance of accountability and transparency in the financial affairs of Parliaments.

This subject has special significance for the North-East Region also. I compliment the North-East Region CPA for taking up the subject with a view to familiarizing the legislators of the Region with the concept of Performance Budget and its strengths. In view of the commitment of the Government of India to bring about massive socio-economic development in the Region and the considerable budgetary support extended towards this objective, the role of the Legislatures to ensure proper utilization of funds assumes greater importance. I am sure this Conference would deliberate upon these crucial issues which will help bringing in greater efficiency and accountability in our fiscal management and lead to coordinated and better implementation of Governmental programmes.

The need for better performance by Legislatures is a subject that will be dealt with while discussing the second item of the Agenda too, which is 'Time Management for Promoting efficiency in the Activities of the Legislatures'. We must pay proper attention to time management as the volume of legislative business has expanded tremendously and the nature of the legislation has become more complex, while the number of sittings has been observed to be shrinking.

One of the issues that concerns all of us is the frequent disruption of House proceedings resulting in the wastage of precious time. Often attempts are made to raise issues knowing that they cannot be so raised under existing Rules. Sometimes, even the budget is passed without discussions. Though assurances of cooperation are given to the Speaker, the same are not observed. There appear to be deliberate attempts to disturb proceedings leading to adjournments. The Chair's repeated pleas to maintain order in the House are not heeded and its authority is questioned creating a situation that is detrimental to the proper conduct of business and dignity of the House. The live telecast of parliamentary proceedings has brought our Legislature closer to the people and now they can see for themselves how their representatives discharge their responsibility in the House and it is hoped that Members whose behaviour is a blot in our democratic functioning will not be condoned. The wastage of time of the House and forced adjournments have given rise to doubts in the minds of the people, particularly the youth, about the relevance of our representative bodies. Questions are being raised about spending crores of rupees of public money in maintaining an institution that is not allowed to function. It is a matter for serious introspection that about 133 hours of precious time of Lok Sabha was lost in 2007 due to interruptions and adjournments. The figure was about 75 hours in 2005 and 98 hours in 2006. Already this year we have lost about 20 per cent of the total allotted time of the Lok Sabha due to adjournments and disruptions. It should be remembered that there are various Parliamentary devices that provide ample opportunities to the members to raise issues in the House or to highlight a grievance. Wasting the time of the House erodes Parliament's ability to discharge its watchdog function as also to have detailed discussion on legislative proposals and Demands for Grants of various Ministries. It also deprives the members, who wish to participate with a sense of responsibility, the opportunity to participate in the proceedings of the House. Disruption of the proceedings due to interruptions and adjournments tantamounts to denigrating the entire democratic fabric of the country.

The most important foundation of parliamentary democracy is the faith of the public in the efficacy of the system to address their hopes and concerns in the best way possible. Therefore, Legislative Bodies must be allowed to function in a manner so as to maintain and uphold people's faith in parliamentary democracy and its dignity and sanctity.

Both the Legislature and the Executive have to ensure that the Legislature plays its due role as enshrined with Constitution. In the North-Eastern Region, which has been provided substantial resources by way of special economic and developmental packages and through the allocation of mandatory 10 per cent of the Annual Plan expenditure of all Central Ministries, it is essential that the Legislatures keep an unremitting watch over various Programmes and to ensure that the available money is spent prudently and in the best interest of the people. I am sure that with sincerity and commitment, the Legislatures of North-East Region can become model Houses to be emulated by the rest of the country.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the 11th Conference of the North-East Region Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I am sure that the Conference will be a great success and will have very fruitful deliberations and help in further strengthening parliamentary democracy in the country as a whole and in the Region in particular.

Thank you.

ENHANCING NUTRITION AWARENESS*

It is indeed a matter of pleasure and an honour for me to have the opportunity to associate myself, once again, with the ongoing programmes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development for enhancing nutrition-awareness in the country. The Exhibition on Nutrition Awareness, organized by the Food and Nutrition Board of the Ministry is a commendable initiative. I am happy to note that under the able and dynamic leadership of the Minister, Smt. Renuka Chowdhury, the Ministry is able to sustain the campaign with greater vigour. Community outreach programmes, like this exhibition on nutrition, is very helpful in addressing the grave problems associated with malnutrition in the country.

Various forms of malnutrition manifested in anaemia and other forms of deficiencies greatly affect the Gross National Product of many countries. An ill-fed and under-nourished population cannot be expected to contribute effectively towards nation-building. Micronutrient deficiencies afflict all age groups and both sexes. The three deficiencies of vitamin A, iron and iodine along with under-nutrition have been among factors significantly impeding India's economic growth. According to an estimate, the cost of treating the effect of malnutrition among the people is 27 times more than the investment required for its prevention.

Although there has been significant improvement in the nutritional levels of children and adults during the last three decades, the present levels of malnutrition are still unacceptably high. Studies have revealed that nearly 46 per cent of the pre-school children are underweight, 79 per cent of children in the age group of 6-35 months are anaemic, 0.7 per cent suffer from vitamin A deficiency, and more than 10 per cent suffer from iodine deficiency-related disorders. Anaemia levels in pregnant and lactating mothers and adolescent girls is a cause of concern in the country.

Problems like the high rates of infant mortality and maternal mortality have their roots in the general nutrition-deficient food habits of our people and in the lack of access to quality health-care and sanitation for them. These have to be tackled on a priority basis if we have to transform our huge

* At the Inauguration of the Exhibition to mark the National Nutrition Week organised by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, New Delhi (5 September 2008).

human resources into an asset in the fast-changing global environment. India is home to four hundred and twenty-seven million children. Since they account for almost 41 per cent of the total population, it is essential that our policies and programmes have a very positive children-orientation.

Dietary diversification is an important strategy of nutrition education. It should be incorporated into the mass awareness campaigns for social mobilization in the country. There is also a need to integrate a core nutrition module into the different training programmes launched for the benefit of women and children by various agencies, both governmental and non-governmental. The Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare, Human Resources, Agriculture, and *Panchayatiraj* should lay special emphasis on this aspects of people's welfare into their programmes. The political parties as well as the civil society, apart from the governmental agencies, should all not only be concerned at the present worrying situation but should adopt, as part of their duty to the nation, policies which are meant to tackle these serious short-comings, and should strive to implement the same with all sincerity and commitment.

A large number of children suffer from malnutrition due to causes like food insecurity, female illiteracy and poor access to health-care and safe drinking water, poor sanitation and poor purchasing power. Widespread poverty resulting in chronic and persistent hunger is the biggest scourge of developing countries like ours.

The Parliament has to play much more positive role in addressing the problems of women and children, by closely monitoring the progress of various schemes and projects.

In spite of these efforts, millions of children are forced to live a life of drudgery and labour, deprived of the innocence of childhood, denied opportunities of education, nourishment, health and sanitation and subjected to undeserving hardships and indignity.

Therefore, along with effective legislations, policies and schemes, we need also to help change the attitude of the society at large. This is where the outreach programmes and awareness campaigns assume great importance. The NGOs, Self Help Groups and other civil society organizations, the media and the corporate sector should also come forward and make conscientious efforts to — address the challenges in this area. The community as a whole as also the major political parties have a responsibility to ensure that everyone has the right to live a healthy life.

We now have a Parliamentary Forum on Children to facilitate focused attention to come from the Parliamentarians and through them, of the society

as a whole, towards critical issues affecting our children's well-being. The Forum enables the members of Parliament in highlighting children's issues and in fostering effective strategic partnerships with all the stakeholders in addressing the challenges in our children's development. The Ministry of Women and Child Development can usefully associate itself with such forums in its campaigns for nutrition-awareness.

I would like to compliment the Hon'ble Minister, Smt. Renuka Chowdhury, and the Ministry of Women & Child Development once again for all their endeavours in addressing the challenges faced by our women and children. With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate the exhibition and the events associated with the National Nutrition Week this evening.

Thank You.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL CONSENSUS BUILDING*

I feel greatly honoured to have been invited to deliver this Lecture in memory of JRD Tata, a pioneering industrialist and an exceptional human being, who was indeed a *Bharat Ratna*. While paying my respectful homage to the legendary patron of entrepreneurship and individual initiative in India, I compliment the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India for organizing the Memorial Lecture in honour of a great Indian who was instrumental in laying a strong foundation for Indian industry in half a century of his distinguished stewardship of the nation's largest industrial house.

Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata, affectionately known as JRD to the world, was indeed India's most well-known industrialist, widely respected for his enormous and pioneering contribution to the development of Indian industry. He was not merely an industrialist, but a business leader, a motivator, a firm believer in innovation and perfection, and a philanthropist who deeply felt for his countrymen and a humanist who was sensitive to the travails of the poor and the downtrodden. He epitomized a brand and a culture of business that commanded great respect and was almost synonymous with India and its people.

J.R.D. Tata's achievements can be best measured through the perspective of the economic and political history of the country. He always encouraged professional expertise and entrepreneurial talent wherever he spotted it and encouraged and harnessed the merit of his executives, giving them full freedom for innovation and initiatives. He succeeded because he believed that 'to be a leader you have got to lead human beings with affection'. To him, the crux of any successful labour policy lay in making workers feel wanted and he introduced several progressive labour and human resources management practices in his companies.

The wide array of interests that JRD had can be seen in the range of fields in which he made his contribution and extended his patronage. His passion for technology, for arts and the sciences and his patriotic zeal for taking the nation forward socially and economically motivated him to play a crucial

* At the J.R.D. Tata Memorial Lecture, 2008 on *Economic Development and Political Consensus Building*, New Delhi (19 September 2008).

role in advancing India's scientific, medical, artistic and various other branches of knowledge. The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, the Tata Memorial Hospital, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, the National Institute of Advanced Sciences and the National Centre for the Performing Arts, to name a few, are models of excellence in their respective fields which grew mainly due to the patronage and the steadfast support of J.R.D. Tata. His concern at the country's alarming population growth impelled him to help in the formation of International Institute for Population Sciences. In recognition of his achievements, he was honoured with several awards both inside and outside the country that included the *Padma Vibhushan*, and the United Nations' Population Award for his contribution to Population Studies. A grateful nation conferred on him the *Bharat Ratna* in 1992 for his remarkable services to the Indian industry and nation-building.

Standing here to deliver the present Lecture instituted in the memory of JRD, I have chosen to speak on 'Economic Development and Political Consensus Building', a theme that is extremely relevant today as it was during his time also. India's economic development, especially in the first half-century of Independence, was deeply entwined with the success story of JRD and the business group which he led.

In the wake of freedom, our Founding Fathers adopted parliamentary democracy as the system of governance to deal with the social, religious and ethnic diversity of our country as also to combat the multifarious challenges that the people had to face. A multi-party system was one of the central components in that.

The goal set by the Founding Fathers of our Constitution can be achieved only through a vibrant system of democratic governance, committed to secularism, inclusiveness and egalitarianism. Today we are recognized as the largest working democracy in the world, seeking to preserve national unity and cohesion in a highly pluralistic society. Our people have shown deep commitment and enthusiastic participation in the democratic process which has so far sustained our democratic structure; though there are many grey areas requiring the nation's focused attention, before we can develop and nurture a pro-people structure of governance. Working within the framework of a parliamentary democracy, no doubt, the country has made significant strides in several areas of our national life, but we cannot be complacent as we still have to address the gigantic challenges before us in diverse spheres to ensure that the people enjoy all their rights as our Constitution provides by achieving and providing for sustained economic development.

We have indeed made significant strides in achieving a steady momentum in our economic growth and India today is recognized the world over as an important economic power. Our achievements through the Green and the

White Revolutions, and our advances in the field of atomic energy, in space and the Defence-related industry, in information and communications technologies, in the pharmaceutical and manufacturing sectors, in bio-technology and in other areas of scientific and technological research, are matters about which we can legitimately be proud of. We have been witnessing consistently increasing growth rates during the last few years which augur well for our future and for our democracy, provided we ourselves do not create stumbling blocks, by indulging in divisive, disruptionist and diversionary tactics.

Over the decades, we have laid the foundations for a modern and progressive society through effective State intervention and many progressive legislations to address the concerns of the common people, particularly of the weak and the vulnerable and to bring in an egalitarian system. We should take legitimate pride in our achievements made so far and should continue to utilise our vast human and natural resources for the further socio-economic transformation of our country.

Nonetheless, we should constantly remind ourselves that even after sixty years of independence, different sections of our people live in different centuries. Despite several decades of economic planning and political maturity gained in the matter of governance, millions of our people have still not been emancipated from the vicious web of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, poor health, low productivity and other economic and social infirmities, specially so in the case of the disadvantaged and marginalized sections, who are still to enjoy in sufficient measure the fruits of progress made so far. We are still grappling with several complex problems that need to be solved with sincerity, sensitivity and commitment.

As Prof. Amartya Sen has observed in his recent Prof. Hiren Mukherjee Memorial Lecture delivered in the Central Hall of Parliament, '... there are momentous manifestations of severe injustice in our own world today in India, such as appalling levels of continued child under-nourishment (almost unparalleled in the rest of the world), continuing lack of entitlement to basic medical attention of the poorer members of the society, and the comprehensive absence of opportunities for basic schooling for a significant proportion of the population'.

Our country is still home to the largest number of illiterates in the world today. Though we have achieved 65 per cent literacy, we are still a long way from our target of universal literacy. It is estimated that only 56 per cent of children in the age group of 5 to 9 years are attending schools in our country. There are even now thousands of villages without quality educational facilities. Only less than 10 per cent of university-eligible youth have real access to higher education. Needless to say, it reflects very poorly on our nation that

about one-third of its population is denied even basic education and only an insignificant minority has access to higher and quality education.

Marginalization of women has been a stumbling bloc in our efforts to have a balanced and equitable development of all sections of the society and to make our democracy fully inclusive and participatory. Women's representation in the higher representative bodies is extremely inadequate and we are still struggling to find a consensus on the need to provide them better representation. To make our development process truly comprehensive we have to take effective steps to make our women equal partners in the task of nation-building. I do sincerely hope that political parties will rise above partisan politics and evolve a consensus, to enact the Bill introduced in Parliament during the Budget Session this year, to ensure increased representation to women in our higher representative bodies which is indeed one of our priorities, apart from ensuring educational, health care and secure living conditions.

To quote Prof. Amartya Sen again 'A government in a democratic country has to respond to on-going priorities in public criticism and political condemnation. ... Justice demands that we make a strong effort to identify the overwhelming priorities that have to be confronted with total urgency. We have to ask what should keep us awake at night'.

Growth and investment in a liberalizing and globalizing economy like ours where a sizeable section live on the fringes, must lead to a better quality of life for the poor and the deprived. There are millions of rural households living in conditions of dehumanizing poverty. Repeated crop failures due to unpredictable climatic variations, inability to meet the rising cost of cultivation and increasing debt burden are among factors leading our farmers to growing frustration expressed in extreme ways. Though the Central Government has taken a very laudable step of providing relief to a large number of farmers from their burden of debt owed to financial institutions, meeting the challenges of rural reconstruction becomes a priority task indeed, for which the nation needs political consensus.

Agriculture being the main sector which employs the largest number of people within our economy, it is imperative to have a comprehensive and time-bound programme of action to extricate the sector from stagnation, if not deceleration. It is today a national responsibility to help lift agriculture from its subsistence level and turn into an income generating activity so that our farmers are not left to the vicissitudes of uncertain weather, unstable financial resources and unreliable markets and are able to enjoy a better quality of living.

Vast areas of the country will have to be provided with adequate infrastructure like good roads, sufficient power and telecom and distribution facilities. More than 30 per cent of India's 640,000 villages are still not connected by roads. Around 60 per cent of rural households do not have access to electricity. Rural tele-density is still below 2 per cent. Evolving effective policies in these vital areas going beyond the compulsions of divisive politics, still remain a critical challenge for the entire political class today.

In order to realize our full economic potential, it is important to recognize that the developmental challenges before India are not to be reduced to one of making a choice between the imperatives of industrial development and the compelling need for agricultural growth. It is not realistic to assume that the development of rural India can be achieved relying exclusively on agriculture. What we need is an integrated development strategy which will take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the different sectors of our economy and one in which the agents of development would intervene according to the need of each sector and the different regions of the country. Apart from the need for steady industrial development, we should take short term measures such as providing remunerative support prices and making cheap agricultural credit available, as well as make substantial long term investments in irrigation, water conservation, building rural roads and markets, electrifying villages, providing quality primary education and health facilities in the rural areas.

Wherever possible, we should amalgamate industry and agriculture taking into account the urgent necessity of development and the possibilities and the resources that a particular region can offer. Such matters cannot be decided on the basis of partisan considerations dehors the need of a balanced development, which will ensure a good quality of life to all segments of the people, particularly to the rural masses. It is essential that the political parties and others associated with the governance process and the developmental activities should demonstrate the willingness as also the sincerity to draw up and implement schemes with well-chosen priorities and should devise new paradigms, wherever necessary. Economic development cannot be subjected to political muscle-flexing without caring for their destructive effect, only to suit narrow political interest. All political parties must have a vested interest in economic development, which alone can bring about and sustain the pace of progress and can create comprehensive opportunities for people's sustenance through creation of jobs and initiation of economic activities.

Providing one billion Indians with the freedom to engage in a productive life and to gain the consequent rewards as individuals and as the members of the society is a gigantic challenge which can be met only through the collective endeavours of all stakeholders. Whichever party or parties may be

in power, the nation as a whole must effectively deal with the problems of poverty, unemployment and underemployment on a war-footing, channelising the fruits of sustained economic growth in recent years. Development and planning for progress should never be the subject of mutual recrimination and attempts to weaken efforts of industrialization on the basis of partisan approach.

The Government of the day has no doubt to take the initiatives and adopt and implement suitable policies for solving the nation's urgent and outstanding problems, for which the different segments of the people, may be owing allegiance to different parties, must unitedly participate and contribute. Over the years, Indian federalism has evolved various institutional mechanisms like the National Integration Council (NIC), the National Development Council (NDC), the Finance Commission, etc., to discuss issues and problems together and to help evolve a national perspective on the major challenges before the nation and to arrive at consensus on issues of national importance.

Socio-economic uplift of India's masses should not be a matter of theoretical political ideology or political rhetoric, and is the most crucial area warranting political consensus. There must be, nationally a broad agreement among all parties on the imperatives of development itself, if the political parties are really sincere about the country's progress. What is happening today in some States of our country for the presumed benefits of some sections of the people, is essentially destructive of the concept and the need for sustained and balanced development of the country and are manifestations of the worst form of confrontational politics, which will only take the country back to the days of economic stagnation.

We have to be watchful of those sections in society that are out to distract people from the path of development. In pursuing narrow political agenda, not only do such elements undermine the well-conceived and important schemes of development, but hurt the long-term interest of the same people whom they pretend to be helping.

To build an inclusive society, we have to create conditions for political freedom to co-exist with economic freedom and distributive justice. It is the nation as a whole which has to accord priority to the issues concerning our common people, specially the rural poor so that they become the primary beneficiaries of all our developmental policies and programmes. In this connection, it is pertinent to note what JRD Tata had once observed that 'I don't want India to be an economic super power. I want India to be a happy country'.

Development, no doubt, cannot be sustainable if it results basically in the continuing enrichment of the affluent and the powerful and in the further marginalisation of the poor. Development has to be judged in terms of the result it achieves towards meeting the urgent needs of all sections and particularly, the vulnerable sections of the community.

Building a country of India's size and diversity is no mean job; it requires the combined and committed efforts of all people in the common endeavour to bring lasting prosperity and happiness. The views expressed by the inheritor of the Tata legacy, Shri Ratan Tata, sometime back, is reflective of the desire and the demand of the business community in the country today:

> 'This is the time for India to shift gears and for our leaders to view India in the global context — competing and excelling in the global arena. We can no longer compare ourselves with our own past history nor be satisfied with growth and improvement in small increments.'

It is important for the overall growth of the country, to use the opportunities offered by the new economic forces, keeping in mind that the vast majority of our people still need the caring eye of the Government and of the society as a whole capable of contributing to their uplift, to bring themselves to a level where their preferences, their quality of existence also can match the global standards. As the distinguished statesman late Shri K.R. Narayanan said:

> 'We cannot empower people unless we address the issues concerning equity and equality of opportunities for the vast masses of people who have to struggle for their daily existence. ...'

In a vast country like India, with discernible difference on the basis of culture, language, religion, caste, creed, geographical location and different urges and aspirations, we have numerous parties with divergent policies, programmes and priorities. In such a situation it becomes difficult, in the absence of a clear majority earned in the election by any particular party, or a well-defined and cohesive group to realise what are the priorities, which the people have accepted and expressed through their verdict. Since our independence, when India became a republic and adopted the system of Parliamentary Democracy, we have seen gradually the weakening of the leading parties, resulting in the formation of multiplicity of parties having conflicting ideologies, programmes and policies.

For the last several decades no single party nationally has been able to get a majority of its own and the result has been that both in the Centre and in the States, Governments have been formed on occasions by political parties with disparate programmes and ideologies, who combine only with the object

of acquiring power, forming unprincipled coalitions and even by encouraging defections from one party to another which has greatly resulted in vitiating the political morality in the country. Value-based politics, centred around well-defined policies and priorities, has become a casualty leading to vitiating the political atmosphere and uncertainties in the governance structure. Often allegations of horse-trading are made of which we have seen recently a most sordid example. Unfortunately the spectacle of *aya rams* and *gaya rams* still remains the bane of our political system. There have been many instances of post-poll understanding or adjustments between different political parties, only for the purpose of formation of a Government. The instability of such governments and adoption of questionable methods to remain in power have seriously eroded people's faith in the system.

Of course, coalition governments can function well and indeed has functioned well in our country of which the most important example has been the Left Front Government in West Bengal where during the illuminating leadership of Shri Jyoti Basu the same combination of parties constituting the Left Front was in power since 1977, and now continues even after his retirement, for over thirty years. Other combinations, so far tried, have not given rise to any cohesive alternative.

Further, most deplorably people have come to accept that there is a lot of corruption in our political system (which unfortunately cannot be disputed) and that elections are won in many cases through the use of money power or muscle power affecting fair and free elections. This has caused cynicism amongst large sections of well-meaning citizens of the country. Because of such cynicism and lack of respect for the present political system even people, who are otherwise genuinely concerned about the country's future, are indulging in negative criticism of the state-of-affairs without seeking to contribute positively towards the removal of the aberrations or imperfections in the system. Only by bringing in total transparency in our electoral process, and in the method of functioning of the different parties, can we restore public confidence in the system.

I feel that because of these infirmities, unfortunately today, the political atmosphere in the country has got vitiated and politics of intense confrontation, negativism and opposition at all costs is taking the upper hand denying the space for collective and consensual approach towards major national issues. Political power has largely got polarized around identities of caste, religion and language, thereby making the system a reflection of the existing social distortions bereft of the essential national outlook. The proliferation of political parties and groups with limited political or sectional agenda, has created a situation that is in direct conflict with the need to evolve a national vision and outlook. Marking a serious departure from the past which was

characterized by broad national consensus on issues like foreign policy and national security, today partisan approach is applied by different sections for petty political gains, seriously compromising the country's image and its long-term and vital interests.

Friends, in our constitutional scheme of governance, Parliament enjoys primacy in several ways. It is the legislative body that enjoys the power to ensure the accountability of the Executive. Parliament provides us with the national forum to discuss contentious issues and to collectively seek solutions to them through dialogue. It is the ideal place for conflict resolution and management. As the highest representative body, Parliament occupying the pivotal position, has the responsibility to deliberate on issues of national importance and it is expected that those constituting it will rise above narrow sectarian interests and help in evolving a national perspective on the issues before the country.

The various aberrations in our political functioning are matters that should worry all responsible and sensitive citizens. Though the right to dissent is one of the basic features of democracy; differences of opinion should never be equated with hostility. The Ruling and the Opposition Parties in Parliament and in the State Legislatures should see themselves as partners in the consolidation of the democratic process. All our democratic institutions need to demonstrate a greater degree of sensitivity and responsiveness to the growing disenchantment and apathy among our people with different aspects of our national life, particularly our political life. Divisive and communal politics will have to give way to a broad-based national political agenda. Consensus, not confrontation, has to be the basic philosophy of our political engagement.

I have been repeatedly trying to impress upon all concerned that parliamentary democracy can be strengthened only when all the institutions that constitute our governance structure perform at their best keeping the interest of the people and the country in mind and in conformity with our Constitution. To consolidate our system of governance, all constitutional bodies and institutions should function in harmony and in conformity with the fundamental law of the land. The Legislature must reflect the urges and aspirations of the people and the larger national causes as opposed to narrow partisan and parochial issues, the Executive should effectively and successfully address the concerns of the people, and the Judiciary, as an independent arbiter, must dispense speedy and inexpensive justice to every section of our society. Our Constitution does not provide for a super-organ nor does it contemplate encroachment by any one organ into areas demarcated for others, under any assumed superior authority, which only creates distortions in the system. I appeal to the media that while trying to expose the misdeeds and

corrupt practices of public authorities, including people's representatives, it would do well to report their commendable initiatives and achievements as well. No organ or authority should place itself in a manner undermining the collective will of people's representative bodies.

In spite of the numerous challenges being faced on various fronts, democracy in our country has been exhibiting a rare degree of resilience and adaptability. However, I feel there are times when that resilience and adaptability are stretched a bit too far. Everyone associated with democratic institutions at different levels, the political leadership, bureaucracy, the Media, the Judiciary and above all the political parties have to work together keeping the larger interest of the nation in mind to safeguard parliamentary democracy from the tremendous strains experienced today and to further strengthen it in the years to come. What is of the utmost importance is that political parties — both national and regional — must develop a core national perspective so that consensus can be built on issues affecting national interest. We must have a Common National Minimum Programme, as has been aptly suggested by Prof. M.S. Swaminathan. Democratic institutions have to be themselves robust enough to be able to tackle the grave problems of poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, lack of health-care and unemployment facing the country, and that way justify their relevance for the people. Consensual politics, in short, is the need of the hour.

On the brighter side, as I said earlier, the Indian economy is one of the largest in the world today. The 8 per cent plus GDP growth in our economy in recent years indicates that we have unleashed the productive energy and dynamism of our people, forcing their way through the structural bottlenecks to integrate with the global economy. Though globalization, even with all its attendant ills, may be unavoidable in the short run, we have to ensure that the process should include within it the fulfilment of the aspirations of India's teeming millions. Providing employment with reasonable wages, shelter, drinking water, electricity, schools, hospitals, roads, connectivity through communication technology and infrastructure, among other things, to the common people should continue to underline our governance structure. In this noble task, private enterprises and corporate institutions must not shy away from their social responsibility to the people and should make substantial contribution and efforts by their active participation.

A time has come when all sections of the people have to consider very seriously how a country like ours, with its great heritage and civilization, with the magnificent history of its freedom struggle and also with the great talent of the young people, with constructive efforts of the working class, including farmers, peasants and common people, should come out of the present infirmities in the system, so that the country can achieve all round

development at a faster pace. Therefore, I appeal to all sections of the community from this platform to seriously ponder the future of our political set up and the extreme necessities of building political consensus to remove the deficiencies identified with it today, and also to take effective steps for our economic progress and development. A developing country like ours with great potential for development and which has already achieved substantially should not lose the momentum due to divisive and confrontational politics.

I would, therefore, call upon all sections of our political system to view the issues of development, particularly the challenge of uplifting our rural economy, providing a balanced development with industrial progress strengthening the human resources and fulfilling the urgent needs of the people, like food security, education and health-care, as major national issues, transcending political and geographical barriers and partisan considerations so that the core of our national endeavour can be the speedy, inclusive and comprehensive development of the whole country. Various problems of national importance should be dealt with in a spirit of cooperation and that is the only way to serve the larger interest of the country. After all, politics is only an instrument to serve that interest.

Friends, JRD Tata was a corporate leader of unimpeachable integrity and strength of character who was admired both for his resourcefulness, dynamism and courage to take risks, and who never lost sight of the nation's needs while being a private entrepreneur. He believed that the corporate world has a responsibility to give due attention to the welfare of the people by way of giving employment, opening schools and hospitals, constructing roads, supplying drinking water, etc. The philanthropist that he was, JRD was also aware of the social responsibility of an industrial house. He once said:

> Let industry established in the countryside adopt the villages in its neighbourhood; let some of the time of its managers, its engineers, doctors and skilled specialists be spared to help and advise the people of the villages and to supervise new developments undertaken by cooperative effort between them and the company. Assistance in family planning in the villages would be a particularly valuable form of service. None or little of this need be considered as charity... . The benefits of such a joint venture will no doubt initially flow chiefly to the villages, but it is also certainly in the interest of industry that surrounding areas should be healthy, prosperous and peaceful.

The Tata Council for Community Initiatives (TCCI) which certainly draws its inspiration from JRD Tata has prepared the Tata Index for Sustainable Human Development, a pioneering effort at directing, measuring and

enhancing the community work that the Group enterprises undertake. JRD wanted to see a smile on every body's face including those who were strangers to him. He used to say 'the trouble is we do not smile enough. When I am driving in the car and a person appears to recognize me, I look at that person and smile. This makes him happy and does not cost me anything.' He wanted to see India as a nation of a billion smiling people. His vision to make India an economic and industrial power impelled him to help evolve and support many institutions for advancing the cause of Indian industry and scientific and technical education. He anticipated many of the human resource management practices much before they became laws. I am sure his lofty vision and ideas will continue to inspire our leaders, entrepreneurs and the younger generations to make India a strong and prosperous country through a consensual and national approach.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again thank the President and other office-bearers of the ASSOCHAM for giving me this opportunity to share with this august gathering some of my views on issues relating to national development and political activities to build national consensus on issues of national interest. I wish the members of the ASSOCHAM all success in their various endeavours and a rightful role in our nation-building enterprise.

Thank you.

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: BEDROCK OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES*

It is indeed a matter of privilege and an honour for me to have this opportunity to associate myself with the 17th National Conference of the *All India Panchayat Parishad* (AIPP) here this morning.

The AIPP, which is celebrating its Golden Jubilee year, has had the honour of several leaders of national stature, like Shri Balwant Rai Mehta, and Shri Jai Prakash Narayan to lead it during its half a century of glorious existence in the service of the country. Several other great leaders had come forward to associate with the AIPP in different ways all these years. Today it is being ably led by Shri Subodh Kant Sahai and I congratulate him and his colleagues for their extremely laudable achievements.

Over the past five decades of its existence, the AIPP has made remarkable contributions to the country. Its focus on issues that concern the marginalized and the downtrodden and the women-folk merits special mention. One of its latest initiatives called, 'the Eternal Gandhi Campaign', conceived by one of the committed Gandhians of our times, late Nirmala Deshpandeji, whose absence we greatly feel and is a loss to the country, to take the message of Gandhiji to every nook and corner of the country, particularly to the youth and the other sections of the population, is indeed commendable. I take this opportunity to pay my respectful tribute to her memory.

Today, increasingly, the world over, greater focus is being laid on practising and promoting 'people-centred governance as an expression of grassroot democratization process.' Only when citizens, particularly the most marginalized people begin to feel the positive impact of governance can we say that democracy as a system of governance is relevant to the people at large. This can be achieved only if we take the institutions of governance nearer to the people. Governance, to be successful, has to be a participatory process, involving the different levels of representative bodies and the formal administrative machinery as such. The *Panchayati Raj* system which we have envisioned is a noble endeavour in that direction.

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* At the 17th National Conference of the All India Panchayat Parishad, New Delhi (18 October 2008).

India, as Gandhiji observed, lives in her villages. The *Panchayats* cover about 96 per cent of India's nearly six lakh villages and nearly 95.6 per cent rural population. In our country, today, the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions constitute the bedrock for the implementation of the various rural development programmes of the government. Mahatma Gandhi once said: 'The best, quickest and the most efficient way is to build up from bottom. Every village has to become a self-sufficient republic. This does not require brave resolutions. It requires brave, intelligent work ... .' At the time of Independence, Gandhiji again stressed: 'When *Panchayati raj* is established, public opinion will do what violence can never do. The present power of *zamindars*, the capitalists and the *rajas* can hold sway so long as the common people do not realize their own strength. If the people non-cooperate with the evil *zamindari* or capitalism, it must die of inanition. In *Panchayati raj* only the *Panchayat* will be obeyed and the *Panchayat* can only work through the law of their making'.

Gandhiji's views on strengthening our *Panchayati raj* system were reflected in the Constitution in the Chapter dealing with the Directive Principles of State Policy which mandated the State to 'take steps to organize village *Panchayats* and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government'. It took us more than four decades after Independence, to provide constitutional sanctity to the *Panchayati raj* Institutions through the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendments; nevertheless, they are indeed a remarkable contribution of the Indian polity to the cause of grassroot democracy and decentralization of power and authority. By virtue of the 73rd Amendment Act, our *Panchayats* have become constitutionally authorized institutions of rural self-governance in planning and implementation of development programmes having specified subjects under their jurisdiction. As a result of these progressive legislations, today, we have more than three million elected representatives out of whom one-third are women. Thus, a silent revolution through empowerment is happening in the Indian villages and the result of this empowerment and devolution of power is being felt in the Indian polity in more ways than one.

It is indeed a challenge to the Central and the State Governments to see that the objectives enshrined in the statutes are realized and the developmental aspirations of the people are addressed in the most democratic and transparent way. For this, it is important that there is total commitment, objectivity, a sense of devotion and, above all, a political will from the State and the Central Governments and also from the Civil Service apart from those who are or will be associated with the administration of the system. This is indeed a gigantic task obligated by the Constitution for all of us.

Friends, the perspective and methodology of planning for development has undergone tremendous change since the enactment of the 73rd and 74th

Constitution Amendment Acts, which became part of our organic law because of the great initiative and farsightedness of late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, as the Prime Minister. Now, the emphasis is on planning from below with participation at the grassroot level. Today, it is the responsibility of the *Gram Sabhas*, the village *Panchayats*, the block *panchayats* and the district *Panchayats* to decide about the developmental works to be carried out in their jurisdictions. They are expected to have a definite say as it is a peoples' programme with the people as the ultimate beneficiaries as well as the initiators of any project.

The recent decades have raised aspirations of large sections of our people about the institutions of local self-governance. These institutions have helped strengthen our democratic cause substantially by facilitating the empowerment of the people economically, politically and socially. It is, in a way, a silent revolution happening in each and every village with everyone wanting to be partners in the process of development. As I said earlier, the most striking feature of the system is the inclusion of the marginalized sections in the democratic process.

A large number of women, the underprivileged and socially and economically backward people have come to occupy positions of power as a consequence of reservation provided to them in the *Panchayats*. Slowly and steadily, these sections of our society are finding a place in the Indian political establishment and this will undoubtedly contribute to the emergence of a new broad-based political leadership in the country in the long run. There have been many achievements across the PRIs in building confidence which has rekindled the hope of the local people as things are happening very near to them and also because they are part and parcel of the developmental process. It has become a people-oriented programme as the priority and the necessity of projects are decided by the people.

Various studies have been done by different agencies about the working of the *Panchayati raj* Institutions, including the Parliamentary Committees. The underlying theme in all these studies is that to keep up the momentum of decentralization, it is necessary that political will, an enabling environment and above all necessary financial devolution should be treated as essential factors. The success of decentralization depends to a large extent upon the autonomy granted to these constitutionally elected bodies. But it is generally felt that in the field of fiscal decentralization, financial devolution has not happened the way it was expected.

In this respect, it is important and essential that there is objectivity in the financing of *Panchayats* based on the grassroot realities rather than their political affiliation. Once elections are over, everyone should forget their respective contemporary political approaches and should work together to

identify areas which require urgent attention with a view to benefiting the maximum number of people as well as addressing issues that require urgent action. A coordinated and focused approach to problems by the various agencies at the grassroot level can really usher in a developmental revolution and everyone should work to make that revolution happen.

Friends, the *Panchayati raj* Institutions have been entrusted with enormous responsibilities and consequently there are very high expectations from these local governance bodies today. These institutions may not be represented by very highly educated elite and many of them may not have any previous political or administrative experience. The larger question is how to make these elected representatives function in the best possible manner. It is the responsibility of the Governments and the civil society to facilitate and support capacity building of the emerging leadership of the *Panchayats* by exposing them to suitable training programmes and by delegating to them necessary powers and by providing sufficient resources.

Many of the pioneering projects for public welfare like National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, National Health Programmes and several others are being implemented through the *Panchayat* Institutions. Some of these are landmark legislations, which when properly implemented will bring substantial improvement in the lives of our Rural masses. All such schemes should be executed honestly and with devotion and total commitment. Our rural people who are the main intended beneficiaries of these projects should be able to enjoy the benefits to the fullest measure, as are intended. I appeal to all those who are connected with the *Panchayat* organisations to honestly and sincerely implement these projects and schemes so that entire resources which are meant for their benefit reach them and are not wasted or siphoned away partly or wholly. Unfortunately, there are complaints from various States about the misuse of the resources through corrupt methods, which is a matter of great concern and should be treated as anti-national activities. It is our duty as a nation to see that every *paisa* earmarked for our people mostly in rural areas is fully utilized for their benefit and for nothing else. In this respect, I appeal to the members of the different elected bodies like Legislative Assemblies and Parliament to render their valuable assistance by monitoring and supervising, without interfering in any manner, due implementation of the different schemes for which repeated appeals have been made to the members of Parliament by the Hon'ble Union Minister for Rural Development. I join the Hon'ble Minister in appealing once again to all my colleagues in Parliament to discharge this extremely important function as regularly, sincerely and comprehensively, as possible. Since the funds for these projects are provided by the Central Government and have been approved by the Parliament, it is a special responsibility of the members of Parliament to extend their helping hand to

the *Panchayats* by sincere monitoring and supervising the due implementation of the projects.

The PRIs can contribute effectively to sound governance practices in our country as there is substantial scope for democratic decentralization and devolution of powers, enriching the system of accountability and transparency and, above all, for transferring powers to the people at the grassroot level for the ultimate benefit of the nation as a whole. It all depends on the political will, we demonstrate to use these institutions for the betterment of the people and the society at large.

Three-quarters of our population still continue to live in rural areas spread over six lakh villages. In the years to come, the *Panchayati raj* Institutions have to play a major role in the development of the country. On many occasions, the bureaucracy and the various higher institutions have been formed to be non-co-operative in bringing about effective decentralisation. We need to ensure that these institutions are given the political space they deserve and a fair chance to demonstrate their strength and purpose in the most effective way. I am sure with the committed intervention of the AIPP and support and co-operation from the Governments at the Centre and in the States, the PRIs would lead an era of development at the grassroot level across the country. The *Panchayats* are the building blocks to development and prosperity of our people. The success of our democracy and the progress of the nation itself will depend on how, together, we strengthen our governance structures in which the PRIs have a crucial role.

I am happy that I have the opportunity to associate with this important Conference this morning. I extend my good wishes to AIPP and the representatives who have assembled here from different parts of the country to attend this National Conference to continue your good work in the service of the people.

With these, I have great pleasure in inaugurating your 17th National Conference.

Thank you.

SECULARISM AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION*

It is a matter of honour for me to have been given the opportunity to associate myself with the annual day celebrations of the well-known and almost a century-old monastic order, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, one of our great socio-religious organizations, dedicated to the service of the people, propagating the great human values of fraternity, tolerance and inclusiveness. I am indeed thankful to Swami Atmajnanandaji for this rare privilege. On this occasion, I beg to pay my homage and profound respect to Acharya Sreemat Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj, the holy founder of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha. My father, late Shri N.C. Chatterjee, was close to Swamiji and I had the great privilege of having the *Darshan* of Swamiji at the Ashram premises at Rash Behari Avenue, Kolkata, when I had accompanied my father. Along with his spiritual calling, Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj had always taken great interest in our freedom struggle and extended support and assistance to the freedom fighters and was a constant source of inspiration to them.

Bharat Sevashram Sangha, with the goal of universal emancipation, has been tirelessly working for the uplift of the downtrodden and the neglected sections of our society, ever since its foundation in 1917. Its efforts in reaching out to the people in distress, particularly during natural calamities are most commendable. The extensive relief and rehabilitation works undertaken by the Sangha during the Bengal famine, Midnapore cyclone, West Bengal Floods, Bhopal Gas Tragedy, Andhra Pradesh Cyclone, Orissa Super Cyclone, the devastating *tsunami* and the recent floods in Bihar, to name some of the occasions, stand testimony to the philanthropic commitment of the Sangha. It is indeed commendable that throughout its chequered history, the Bharat Sevashram Sangha has ever remained committed to its noble objectives and has been contributing significantly towards empowering the neglected and the weaker segments of society through its people-oriented programmes and activities. By its own example, it has been able to attract and motivate people to various social and philanthropic activities.

In a growing communally polarized environment, where sections of the society are relentlessly trying to create chasm between different religious groups, the Sangha's steadfast commitment to secularism and national

* At the Annual Day Celebrations of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha, New Delhi (24 October 2008).

integration is, indeed, inspiring. I am very happy that you have chosen the occasion of your Annual Day to have a seminar on 'Secularism and National Integration', an extremely relevant subject for our country today. Never before in the history of independent India has there been such a communally surcharged atmosphere as it is prevailing today and every well-meaning citizen should be greatly concerned about the same.

Our people have for a long time cherished the values of tolerance and co-existence and never encouraged the ways of violence and self-destruction. But to-day, some sections of the people in the country are taking recourse to violence and destructive activities, which to my mind, is substantially due to systematic attempt by some political forces inspired by fascist ideology to bring about political polarization around religious symbols and identities in the country, seriously endangering our democratic consolidation.

At the time of Freedom, our Founding Fathers had visualized an India, where people of all castes, classes, creeds and religions and all sections of the society would live peacefully and flourish together and contribute their mite to the building of a strong, progressive and prosperous country and thus help it free itself of socio-economic backwardness, inequity, strife and exploitation and enjoy the fruits of development in equal measure. Establishment of a secular State was a logical extension of the spirit of the freedom struggle, in which all sections of our people, cutting across the religious, regional, linguistic and caste divide, took active part and made great sacrifices to achieve the common noble objective of freedom from colonial rule. It was also in tune with our own traditional ethos and world-view based on tolerance and co-existence.

As Shri Aurobindo, the great seer and revolutionary whose thinking had greatly influenced many of our nationalist leaders, observed: 'Indian religion has always felt that since the minds, the temperaments and the intellectual affinities of men are unlimited in their variety, a perfect liberty of thought and of worship must be allowed to the individual in his approach to the Infinite.'

Therefore, our Founding Fathers, visionary as they were, provided for a very sweeping provision in the Constitution, in its most important list of Fundamental Rights itself, ensuring 'freedom of conscience' and the right 'freely to profess, practice and propagate religion'. It was a very bold and powerful message to come along with the birth of a liberal democratic Republic as opposed to a dogmatic or theocratic one. It was all the more remarkable when one considers the extremely provocative and polarized environment of partition in which, unfortunately, free India was born. But our Founding Fathers were too mature and visionary leaders to have succumbed to narrow thinking, while laying the foundations of a new Republic with a magnificent

vision before it and visualizing a pro-active role for it in the newly emerging world order. Therefore, acutely concerned about the future of the country and conscious of the great danger that communal divide could pose to a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious society like India, our leaders made pain-staking efforts to instil confidence among our people in the idea and spirit of co-existence and harmonious living, Gandhiji was firmly of the view that 'All those who are born in this country and claim her as their Motherland, whether they be Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, Christian, Jain or Sikh are equally her children and are therefore, brothers, united together with a bond stronger than that of blood'. He also reminded the people that his heart is 'incapable of making any distinction' between our people of diverse religions.

Our Founding Fathers did not rest contended merely with laying the foundations for a secular society in the fundamental law of the land, but always remained alert and sensitive about the need to nurture and preserve a secular democratic order in the country. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, known for his uncompromising commitment to secularism and national integration, passionately appealing to the countrymen in the early years of the Republic said:

> We should not become parochial, narrow minded, because we have a great mission to perform. Let us, the citizens of the Republic of India, stand up straight, with straight backs, and look up at the skies, keeping our feet firmly planted on the ground and bringing about this synthesis, this integration of the Indian people. Political integration has already taken place to some extent, but what I am after is something much deeper than that — an emotional integration of the Indian people so that we might be welded into one and made into one strong national unity, maintaining at the same time all our wonderful diversity. I do not want this diversity to be regimented and taken away, but we must be wary of losing ourselves in petty quarrels.....

Our leaders reminded the people time and again that in free India, as it emerged in August 1947, not only it was expected but also it was the duty of all our citizens to treat each other in a spirit of harmony. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, one of the chief architects of our Freedom reiterated unequivocally:

> Eleven hundred years of common history (between Hindus and the Muslims) have enriched India with our common achievements. Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs ..... everything bears the stamp of our

> joint endeavour.... The thousand years of our joint life has moulded us into a common nationality. This cannot be done artificially..... Whether we like it or not we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. No fantasy or artificial scheming to separate and divide can break this unity. We must accept the logic of fact and history and engage ourselves in the fashioning of our future destiny.... If there are any Hindus amongst us who desire to bring back the Hindu life of a thousand years ago and more, they dream, and such dreams are vain fantasies. So also if there are any Muslims who wish to revive their past civilization and culture which they brought a thousand years ago from Iran and Central Asia they dream also and the sooner they wake up the better. These are unnatural fancies which cannot take root in the soil of reality. I am one of those who believe that revival may be a necessity in a religion, but in social matters it is a denial of progress.

It is a matter of great concern for our country that forces, inimical to the notions of co-existence and communal harmony, still make efforts to reinforce and nurture separate identities among our diverse people. They have found in religion a tool to rouse fanatic and divisive feelings, intended to weaken, if not destroy, the concept of composite nationalism in the country. Elements fed on hatred and fascist notions of nationalism and social organization have trespassed into the political domain, under the cover of fundamentalist and sectarian religio-cultural bodies, to evolve an allegedly alternative model of nation-building for India. The first requirement of this new model was the demolition of the symbols and identities of unified India evolved painstakingly by the Founders of our Republic. The first victim of this hate-agenda was, understandably, by design or default, none other than the Father of the Nation himself, the real inspiration and the true face of the new-born nation, who, indeed had to give up life for building an all-inclusive society. What happened since then is part of our post-independence history and we are all well aware of it.

We have seen how grievance-hunters have effortlessly discovered the so-called, 'historically convincing' reasons for reinforcing a grievous sense of 'victim-hood', among particular communities and how successfully they have used those notions to whip up communal passions among an otherwise peace-loving and tolerant population. It would be naive to think that a markedly plural society like ours can escape the adverse consequences of such persistent, inward-looking and defeatist notions of nation-building, for a country characterized by illiteracy, underdevelopment, religiosity, social inequities and above all, the reality of a partition on communal lines.

Though it is moments that have caused the harm, but centuries have to pay a price. This is an important lesson that we have to learn from history, otherwise the nation will have to pay a heavy price. We have seen what price generations, cutting across borders, had to pay for letting fascism to flourish in the heart of Europe during the second quarter of the last century.

Friends, today, as a nation we are at a cross road of history and of our secular existence. Never before, since Independence, has the country experienced such a grave threat to its integrity as it does today. Extreme forms of intolerance, negativism, hatred and violence have been generated in the country in the name of narrow, parochial, sectarian, religious and other divisive issues greatly vitiating its social and political atmosphere, weakening our national integration and inhibiting our development. The threatening forces of disruption, if allowed to operate unabated, would wreck the edifice of our country. The signals should no longer be ignored.

Growing and saner sections of the civil society are alarmed to find that our political space is beginning to be occupied by intolerant elements hostile to composite nationalism. The capacity of the State to hold them under leash is increasingly under doubt. When we see around us unruly crowd, carrying swords, spears and other dangerous weapons, some associated with religious symbols, defying the laws which prohibit such activities, it is not to be taken as a mere law and order problem, but primarily as an act of challenge to the very authority and foundation of the State as an institution. The perpetrators of such lawless acts openly dare the State to attempt to stop or control such activities which threaten organized living, and the State cannot possibly afford to counter them, which will only mean pandering to the forces of disruption, fascism and anarchy.

Already, as a result of the perceived complicity of the State in acts of sectarian violence and the State's apparent failure in fixing accountability for administrative laxity and mismanagement accentuated by the slow-moving judicial processes, an impression has been created in the minds of both the aggressor and the victims as also among the other observers that the Indian State is not strong or motivated-enough in dealing with the destroyers of national unity, indulging deliberately in sectarian violence. Its negative and inevitable effects are manifesting themselves in different ways in our society today. The sharpening of communal polarization for political gains is actually leading to the rise of forces and ideas that threaten organized living and the civil society as a whole today.

We must not forget that a weakened State will not be able to hold together a plural and complex society like ours for long. As the eminent India-watcher and columnist Mark Tully recently observed: 'India's Constitution is not being translated into action because the pillars, the institutions, which uphold it

have been weakened'. According to him, this is an inevitable consequence of each of the institutions of the State not discharging its assigned responsibilities and indulging in the game of passing the buck, in the process weakening every institution.

The question, therefore, we have to grapple with in all seriousness, in the peculiar socio-religious, political and economic contexts in which we find ourselves today, is how to deal with and ultimately weed out these anti-national forces who are out to destroy the sentiments of unity and solidarity amongst the people. It is the duty of every patriotic citizen to make sincere efforts to generate a feeling among our people that the country belongs to all, regardless of religious and other distinct identities, have equal stake as citizens and that it is essential for the survival of this nation to cherish a spirit of unity and kinship among themselves.

Our society and its governing system cannot be strengthened if power is sought to be captured by exploiting the divisive identities of our people. Peace, security and fundamental justice are essential for establishing a stable social order. There is an urgent need to nurture the values of secularism and democracy in our society so that at least our future generation can get rid of the scourge of extremism and fundamentalism.

Nothing should be done to encourage polarization of social and political forces around our diverse religions. It is, imperative for all of us to strive unitedly to eliminate from our country the poison of communal hatred, parochial prejudices and sub-regional recriminations. All patriotic people should realize that the forces of disruption, if encouraged to grow, would wreck the edifice of our country in the making of which millions of our people and their leaders had made great sacrifices. Our endeavour should be to hold together the different religious, linguistic and ideological groups in our country to make a well-integrated nation.

Followers of our different religions should remember that no religious philosophy is founded on hatred and violence. The essential concern of all religions has always been the establishment of a just, peaceful and harmonious social order. All our great seers and saints have taught us to be compassionate to all around us, to forget religious identities and serve all. Hurting fellow-human beings, therefore, is the greatest sacrilege that the followers of any religion can commit. As the venerable Vietnamese Teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us, 'violence and strife, which we notice today in contemporary society are symptoms of the deep-seated social malice, which need to be addressed by understanding and with compassion'.

Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest minds that India has produced, believed that sectarianism was the greatest enemy of human progress. Reminding the followers of all religions of the innumerable inhuman deeds committed by man against his fellow beings in the name of religion, he said, at the World Parliament of Religions:

> 'Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilizations and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now.'

According to him, preaching religion to a starving person is an insult not only to that person but also to religion itself. 'The only way in which God dare appear before a starving person' according to Swamiji, 'was in the form of food'. Friends, we should not miss the significance of these words for our country today. Nothing can be more effective in turning humanity from conflict and confrontation to harmony and cooperation than the universal acceptance of the principle of the essential oneness of all humankind.

No doubt, there are factors, other than religious, contributing to the weakening of national cohesiveness. Development and social equity are important to strengthen our people's resolve for unity among them. Everyone in our country, from the lowest strata to the highest should be motivated to think that they have a stake in our national fabric. For the socially and economically exploited, redressal of their grievances by the nation would help them identify themselves with the pluralistic society. It is essential that amongst all our people, there is equity and equality in all respects to be provided, if necessary, along with special opportunities, including reservations, as has been provided in the Constitution, which has since then had to be extended. Unfortunately, and it is a matter of greatest concern, that the minorities and weaker sections of the communities in the country have today justifiable feeling that they are denied the space they should occupy in our national, political and administrative hierarchy. Recent incidents in Orissa and Karnataka show how fanaticism and grossest form of religious fundamentalism have affected their very survival. Crude form of chauvinism is being displayed in its most strident and despicable form in one of the most important States of our country, on the plea of special rights on the so-called basis of being 'sons of the soil' today. The institutions of the State should not be found to be failing, by design or otherwise, in its duty to protect the victimized citizens. In a country like India, characterized by pluralism, discriminatory administration in any State will ultimately result in weakening national integration itself. An emotionally weakened India cannot be expected to be structurally strong.

National integration should be a factor of common interest, without which, the country will be weakened irretrievably. As one of our eminent citizens, Late Nani Palkhivala, once said:

> National integration is born in the hearts of the citizens. When it dies there, no army, no government, no Constitution, can save it. State of mind precedes States. Inter-faith harmony and consciousness of the essential unity of all religions is at the very heart of our national integration.

We have to recognize that national integration cannot be achieved if centrifugal and centripetal forces work simultaneously pulling the country in opposite directions. National integration as a process can be effective only if the whole national leadership and the people at large, particularly the youth of the country, who have the greatest stake in its future, work unitedly to build a physically and emotionally integrated country. For this, first and foremost, it is imperative that the responsible political parties agree on the need and methodology to build such a nation.

When Prime Minister Nehru took the initiative to set up the National Integration Council (NIC), way back in 1961, it was hoped that this body, constituted as it is of the leaders of the country at the top level, both from the Ruling and the Opposition parties, the Chief Ministers of the States, eminent representatives from the Media and the Civil Society, would act as an effective force of national integration. The objective was to find ways and means, through the highest level deliberations of this body, to combat the evils of communalism, casteism, regionalism, linguism and narrow-mindedness, and to formulate definite conclusions in order to give a lead to the country. Until recently, it was deemed to be an effective forum in reviewing and analyzing the state of the nation, particularly from the point of view of nation-building and national integration. Of late, however, even this important body is being used to indulge in confrontationist and divisive political agenda of the different Parties in the country.

Today we need most urgently, a broad and visionary leadership, with a pan-Indian perspective, uncompromisingly committed to the values and ethos that inspired and guided its Freedom Movement, and strongly committed to promoting amity and fraternity among all communities and towards building a forward-looking India, which will not discriminate between its citizens on any basis whatsoever. We must succeed in developing among our people, a strong consciousness and feeling of identification which will enable them to think and act, transcending the primordial loyalties of language, caste and religion, to be first and foremost a citizen of India and then only we can succeed in our endeavour to integrate our country effectively. This is a challenge that our youth must take upon themselves with a strong resolve

that they will shun all divisive thoughts and activities, which are destructive of national unity and fellow feeling. All our democratic institutions and the political organizations have to be consciously mobilized and channelised towards achieving this noble objective.

The focus of those associated with the political processes and governance should be on meeting the developmental needs of the people and should not be directed towards reinforcing religious identities or divisive issues among them and the national endeavour should be to ensure to the people the enjoyment of at least the basic minimum necessities for a dignified existence which alone can make politics relevant for those who deserve public intervention.

Once again, I express my respectful thanks to Swami Atmajnanandaji Maharaj for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the Annual Celebrations Day of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha. I am sure, occasions like this would help in reinforcing our commitment to secularism, national unity and harmonious co-existence.

Thank you.

NATIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMMES—NEW VISIONS*

I am extremely happy to be with you here today at the Inaugural function of the 36th International Association for Housing Science (IAHS) World Congress hosted by the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. This Congress is extremely important specially in the light of the current crisis in global economy and in the financial market which has seriously affected the housing and real estate sector also. This Congress, being held for the third time in India and after a gap of 20 years, with emphasis on 'National Housing Programmes — New Visions', will greatly facilitate interaction among housing scientists, experts, policy-makers, real estate developers and others, not only on housing programmes but also on how to withstand the heat generated by the global meltdown. The city of Kolkata with its huge urban population and an efficient administration is becoming an attractive centre for real estate development. Many housing construction companies have ongoing projects in the city and we are looking forward to the presence of many more such players in the coming years. As such, it is quite appropriate that this sprawling metropolis is hosting the IAHS World Congress and I must compliment the organizers for the choice of the venue.

It is unnecessary to emphasize that housing is one of the basic needs of human beings, rich or poor, illiterate or educated, rural or urban. Nonetheless, in spite of all the efforts now made by individuals and both governmental and non-governmental bodies, the hard reality is that millions of people across the world still live without any roof above their heads and this is increasingly becoming a problem area for policy makers everywhere. Today, half of the world population lives in cities which is going to be about three-fifth in the next two decades, and thus there will definitely be a proportionate requirement of housing which calls for synergising our policies and priorities to make houses available and affordable to all.

Our country is home to more than a billion people and millions of people are still homeless. Thus, housing remains one of the basic problems facing our nation. Given the magnitude of the problem and the amount of resources required for addressing this challenge, providing affordable housing to all remains a major concern for the Government and policy planners. At the end

* At the Inauguration of the 36th International Association for Housing Science (IAHS) World Congress, Kolkata (3 November 2008).

of the 10th Five Year Plan, the housing shortage in urban areas is estimated to be 24.7 million units which is likely to increase to 26.53 million during the 11th Plan and 99 per cent of the shortage pertains to economically weaker sections and low income groups. Given the fact that 26.7 per cent of our country's over 300 million poor live in urban areas, the issue of affordability acquires critical importance. While there has been a decline in the country's total poor population, and we have every reason to rejoice at this, sadly, there has been an increase in the number of urban poor. The total estimated investment for meeting the housing requirement in urban areas up to 2012 is estimated to be of the order of over Rupees 3.61 lakh crore.

Given the scale of the requirement and the budgetary constraints of both the Union and the State Governments, it is quite clear that the issue requires adoption of a more pragmatic and workable approach as the Governments alone cannot meet the huge requirements. From the evolution of the Governments role as architect, then as planner, as provider, as enabler, as described in some of the Conference papers, to that of a partner, to my mind, is a pragmatic step which will involve all sections of the society in the gigantic task of providing affordable houses to all, which the Government, in view of the resource-constraints, cannot alone afford to undertake. We need to adopt a practical approach that combines the efforts of multiple stake-holders like the private sector, co-operative sector, industrial sector, besides the State sector, as the Housing Department of the Government of West Bengal has done, very successfully, for which the Hon'ble Minister Shri Gautam Deb deserves all the encomiums. The National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy, 2007 emphasizes on the adoption of such an approach as it will ensure sustainable development of habitat in the country and will by and large ensure equitable supply of land, shelter and services at affordable prices to all sections of society. The Policy has also given additional emphasis on the need for developing various financial and operational innovations for bridging the housing shortage.

A High Level Task Force set up by the Government of India is looking into various aspects of providing affordable houses for all, besides examining the framework of regional planning and master planning with a view to enhancing the supply of developed land. The Task Force will recommend measures for promotion of low cost building technologies and suggest legislative measures for accelerating the supply of housing units for the urban poor. Besides examining various fiscal and spatial incentives for increasing supply of houses to economically weaker sections and low and middle income families, the Task Force will assist the Government in devising an integrated strategy for *in-situ* slum upgradation for improving the quality of habitat as well as providing the urban poor with places to live and work.

Since availability of easy finance and credit facilities is a major stumbling block in acquiring a house, this aspect needs to be attended to so as to facilitate and expedite flow of finance to the needy. It also needs to be ensured that loans are given to the people with a reasonable interest rate and flexible repayment duration. Another area that needs attention is the development of proper infrastructure like water supply, power, roads, transport, educational and health care facilities, recreational and other facilities, which are essential for the housing projects in tune with the environmental requirements.

Today, water availability is a major problem in our urban areas and given the scarcity of water, water harvesting and recycling systems have to be integrated into our housing complexes, which, at least to some extent, will relieve the pressure on the civic bodies for supply of water for our cities and townships. Efforts must be made to encourage the use of renewable energy resources and adoption of effective solid waste management practice along with the necessity of maintaining the environmental norms and as such the real estate developers and the town planners should necessarily leave sufficient green area in the city to enable the inhabitants to breath some fresh air.

It is necessary to see that ordinary and unsuspecting citizens do not fall victims to the land mafia and unscrupulous builders. Slums are the sore sight of our city life and the problems of the slum-dwellers require to be solved with urgency and compassion. It is the nation's responsibility to provide at least the basic services to the urban poor and perhaps Cooperative Group Housing Societies of urban poor can provide better services to them.

As specialists in the field, you are aware that building materials account for a substantial part of the total cost of construction of houses, which need to be made affordable. In this era of rapid urbanization, and particularly when the urban population in India is estimated to reach 576 million in 2030, providing affordable houses will be our biggest challenge. Optimum utilization of available energy resources and raw materials to produce simple, energy efficient building materials, adoption of energy efficient construction methods, besides innovative sustainable materials, will be most needed to reduce the construction cost and in meeting the increasing demand or building materials. Both the policy makers and the private players have to find innovative ways to bring down construction costs. It is also incumbent on all of us to develop and promote disaster resistant construction technologies and adopt the best available housing construction practices in building houses in disaster-prone areas. It is a welcome development that the Government is actively encouraging use of innovative, cost-effective, energy efficient and green technologies in the housing and construction sector.

As it happens, building construction and development are taking place mostly in some selected pockets often beyond the reach of a vast section of our people. The problem of housing is also acute in our rural areas and the *kutcha* houses they have lack basic amenities like drinking water, electricity, toilets, etc. The rural people need all help by way of easy funding and appropriate technology and construction materials for building durable houses. The real estate industry in India is estimated to be of 12 billion US dollars with a growth rate of 30 per cent and is the second largest employment generator after agriculture and serves about 250 ancillary industries. Naturally, it has the potential to trigger economic growth, generating demands in many other sectors. It is necessary to pay due attention in this respect to housing both in urban and rural areas.

All involved in housing construction and policies must keep in mind that environment friendly quality houses are made available at an affordable price and help remove one of the most difficult challenges facing our society today. I am happy that the IIT, Kharagpur, is organizing this Congress. I trust and believe that by associating institutions like the IIT with such endeavour would throw up new ideas to confront the challenge of housing faced by the nation.

I sincerely hope that the deliberations at this Congress of housing scientists, experts, policy makers and real estate developers will address this issue in a holistic manner and come out with a vision that would provide hope to the millions of homeless people to own a house of their own. I am sure that your discussions will come out with the best practices in the housing construction from around the world, including lessons from successes and failures.

May I convey my best wishes for the success of the 36th IAHS World Congress.

Thank you.

RTI AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE*

I am happy to have this opportunity to associate myself with the valedictory session of the Third Convention of the Central Information Commission organized to mark three years of the implementation of the Right to Information Act in our country.

I thank Mr. Habibullah for his invitation and for selecting the important topic of 'RTI and its Ramifications for Good Governance', for discussion in this Convention, as free flow of information is the fundamental pre-condition of good governance, which ensures transparency essential for strengthening democracy. Undoubtedly good governance and right to information are complementary to each other as they on their turn stabilize and broaden the working of the democratic system. I am sure you have had useful discussion on the subject at this convention.

Our Constitution acknowledges the citizens' right to know about all aspects of governance, as a fundamental right, which is enforced partially and rather inadequately through the working of the parliamentary system, and is required to be supplemented by conferring on the people the right to enforce the same. It was on a parliamentary initiative that the Freedom of Information Act was put in place in 2002 to provide to every citizen the right to secure access to information under the control of public authorities, consistent with public interest, in order to promote openness, transparency and accountability in administration. A more cohesive, purposeful and effective system has now been brought about with the enactment of the Right to Information Act, which is indeed a landmark legislation. The process of implementation of this path-breaking legislation has already created considerable enthusiasm among the common people and also hope that it will provide the needed transparency and openness in governance and will give a better content to the working of democracy in our country. The object of enacting a law like the Right to Information Act is that its *bonafide* use and proper enforcement will ensure widespread participation of citizens in the country's governance system, and eliminate the cobwebs of dilatoriness and corruption in what are known as the dark corners of the nation's administrative

* Valedictory Address on *RTI and its Ramifications for Good Governance* at the Third Annual Convention of the Central Information Commission, New Delhi (4 November 2008).

apparatus and facilitate the process of development at various levels through a transparent process. The Right to Information Act clearly states in its very Preamble that democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency of information which are vital to its functioning.

It has now been widely recognised that the Right to Information not only provides the key to good governance, it also makes participatory democracy meaningful and help in cementing trust in the administration, in supporting people-centered development, in facilitating equitable socio-economic growth and in tackling the problem of corruption and maladministration. Executive accountability is one of the cardinal principles of parliamentary democracy and that accountability should be in terms of both standards of performance and service delivery of public agencies to the citizen-groups they serve. Only a well-regulated system of access to information in the public domain can ensure such accountability.

For democracy to be meaningful, it has to be participative and inclusive in every sense of the term, which can succeed only when due acknowledgment is given to the people's right to seek information effectively from public authorities.

No doubt, we have an array of mechanisms in place, which enable citizens to seek information. Elected representatives, Opposition parties, the Judiciary, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the print and the electronic media all seek information available in the custody of public bodies. But the Right to Information Act enacted by our Parliament empowers the common man directly with the right to have access to information relating to various State activities, which makes the public authorities more accountable. It is rightly said that it is in darkness that cobwebs grow which hinder transparency and progress. Since we have the relevant law in place, we should replace the 'culture of secrecy and confidentiality' with the 'culture of openness and mutual faith', and take all necessary measures to make people adequately aware about the provisions of the law and also to remove the problems that are hindering its effectiveness.

Accountability postulates removal and absence of corruption, malpractice, mismanagement and abuse of discretion, and consequently ensures good governance in all its ramifications. Good governance is no more a segmental function; rather, it encompasses within its fold the whole of societal response. Lack of transparency in Government dealings and activities generally breeds and encourages insensitiveness and inefficiency, which are antithetical to good governance. Accessibility of information particularly relating to financial decisions of the Government and the implementation of public policies and programmes, which have a direct impact on the life of the common masses,

makes all State actors accountable in discharging their mandates. This becomes quite apparent in the light of the fact that the maximum appeals that come before the CIC relate to the Ministry of Finance which has under its jurisdiction important divisions such as banking, insurance, income tax, etc. The Urban Development Ministry, which has the Public Works Department under it, comes close on the heels of the Finance Ministry which again is a pointer to public awareness of issues related to civic amenities and the considerable investments therein. An efficacious right to information regime implemented for *bonafide* purposes will no doubt, promote a culture of public accountability, transparency and probity in the functioning of all governmental organs.

It is extremely unfortunate and a matter of great concern that our country has achieved the dubious distinction of being the eighty-sixth most corrupt country amongst 180 countries, as was concluded by a survey conducted by the Transparency International, the global coalition against corruption. Even after the enactment of the Right to Information legislation, we are yet to get its full benefits. The country's sovereignty and integrity indeed require observance of confidentiality for the sake of country's interest. But it is felt that no document should remain secret forever and they need to be de-classified after certain timeframe, so that information can be released to the public without affecting national interest.

According to various studies, the experience of the implementation of the Right to Information Act in the last three years reveals that the implementations across the board should be streamlined, consistent with the objectives of the Act and public interest. Sometimes applications of citizens seeking information are rejected by the Public Information Officers concerned on vague and undisclosed grounds and even the Appellate Authorities keep matters pending for long, may be for diverse reasons. Even the appeals before the Information Commissions take a long time for their disposal, thereby frustrating the interest of the genuine information seekers.

It has been pointed out in some quarters that procedures vary in the manner of attending to the demands for information in different States. Efforts need to be made to streamline the procedure for sincere implementation of the RTI. It is important that authorities provide correct information in time and there should not be impediments and hindrances on the path of effective implementation of the RTI Act. Since the RTI Act is in force in all the States, a comparative study may usefully be undertaken to find out how effectively the Act is being implemented in different parts of the country. It will help in identifying and overcoming the procedural inadequacies and shortcomings, which hinder effective implementation of this landmark legislation so that solutions may be found.

The Right to Information Act can help the common citizens, especially the poor and the underprivileged, to get their due only when the Governments at the Centre as well as in the States act earnestly to implement the Act which would require appropriate appointments to the Central and State Information Commissions and also strict actions against those in Government who are found responsible for apathy, indifference, corruption and inefficiency in discharging their public duties. Those who are entrusted with this charge should be known for their probity, objectivity, judiciousness and forthrightness.

The lack of knowledge and absence of confidence to take up issues under the Act remain the usual hurdles in making the right to information a very effective tool in the hands of the people who need it the most. It is, expected to become a useful tool if the rural masses are motivated to make effective use of the Act. Proper awareness programmes may be taken up in the rural and interior areas for the benefit of the citizens living there.

Ladies and Gentlemen, apart from taking measures to address the problem associated with the implementation of the Right to Information Law at all levels, what is most urgently needed is to make the citizens fully aware of the nature of the law and also of the benefits that will accrue to them from its proper implementation. But, the Government, which is responsible for creating awareness about the Act under Section 25 of the Act, may have to do more in this regard. I commend the authorities of *Doordarshan* for doing a commendable job in creating awareness. I take this opportunity to call upon the print as well as electronic media to highlight the importance of the Act and also the decisions of the Information Commissions at the Centre as well as in the States so as to encourage people to make effective use of the RTI Act to improve the governance of our country. Educational institutions, especially those imparting higher education, can also play an effective role by educating the students about all aspects of the law governing their constitutional right to obtain relevant information.

It is a matter which requires attention that the Information Commissions both at the Centre and in States are finding it difficult to dispose of the mounting number of RTI related cases coming before them for hearing. The pendency of nearly 7,000 cases with the Central Information Commission, as in June 2008, speaks not only volumes about people's desire for information but also of institutional inadequacy in dealing with them. The piling up of cases, as in the Judiciary, will defeat the very purpose of this well-meaning measure. The reasons for the delays need to be investigated and action taken before the arrears pile up further. It is also a fact that a large number of frivolous cases are filed under the RTI by vested interests or by people with no *bonafide* motive. Unless they are strictly dealt with from the beginning they will add to the backlog and there should be adequate disincentive including imposition of some punishment on frivolous proceedings.

I appreciate the role played by the Central and State Information Commissions in helping citizens to have access to information not easily available to the common people. The Central Information Commission deserves appreciation for his role in duly implementing the provisions of the Act.

In the Lok Sabha Secretariat, we have established appropriate mechanisms to make information available to the citizens required by them under the provisions of this Act. Despite the fact that the Lok Sabha has a very information-packed and comprehensive website, the number of applications received under this Act has been steadily increasing. While in the year 2005 we received only 20 applications, the number of applications increased to 318 in 2006, to 445 in 2007 and to nearly 600 by the end of October this year. Generally, the applications received under the RTI Act relate to constitutional provisions, Bills and Acts relating to the subjects falling under the administrative jurisdictions of various Ministries and Departments of the Government of India, Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, sittings of the House, time lost in the House due to interruptions and disturbances, privilege matters, petitions, parliamentary proceedings, and salaries, allowances and medical expenditure incurred on the Members of Parliament, their attendance in the meetings of the House and parliamentary committees, Questions raised by them in the House, their foreign travels and related expenditure, etc. I am glad to acknowledge that the varied nature of information being sought by the people on the working of the Lok Sabha and its Members itself is an evidence of the interest shown by the citizens in parliamentary activities, which is vital to keep the faith of the common man alive in the country's organic institutions and also to ensure the accountability of the elected representatives to the people in a more effective manner and how the RTI Act is being utilized in this regard.

Ladies and Gentlemen, democracy demands good governance, ensuring, *inter-alia*, transparency, accountability, probity and a corruption-free regime. To have good governance, the public authorities need to become willing partners in sharing information, as may be needed for public purpose with the people who are the real masters in a democracy.

Today, we are living in an information-driven society and witnessing a technological revolution in information management, for which the free flow of information is vital. The success of democracy lies in informed choices, meaningful empowerment of the disadvantaged sections and safeguarding the rights of the marginalized and the vulnerable. For these noble goals to be achieved, the people, their elected representatives and the administration have to work in tandem in a regime where relevant and requisite information is available to all who genuinely need it.

Friends, before I conclude I would like to remind those who have been and are concerned with the implementation of the RTI Act that they should take care to see that the true spirit of the Act is not undermined by vested interests by design or default, by recklessly taking recourse to its provisions without well-meaning social intentions. We need to be on the guard against people who may use it as an instrument to unsettle some well-established norms of governmental functioning, to pursue private or personal agenda in the garb of public interest, or as a short-cut to easy fame and cheap publicity, or as a means to earn their livelihood in the cover of social activism or even as a weapon to discredit people's institutions and reputation.

Well-meaning activists and public spirited citizens, who are inclined to take recourse to this modern legislation, should, however, always bear in mind that this Act was conceived primarily with an intent to serve public good by bringing in the much desired transparency and accountability in governance, a fundamental pre-requisite in a democracy. If the Act, even if by some, is resorted to recklessly, apart from adding to the current trend of arrears, the purpose of the Act will be greatly frustrated, as we find in many cases of Public Interest Litigations. It is, therefore, imperative for the activists in the field, first of all, to be transparent in their own objectives in taking recourse to this well-meaning Act and to educate the people at large to show utmost responsibility and restraint in taking the benefit of the Act. The motivating factor should always be larger social interests or for strictly personal interest on *bonafide* ground.

I compliment Shri Wajahat Habibullah and his officers in the Central Information Commission who are doing a commendable job in making the RTI initiative a success in spite of the many problems connected with it. I am sure their continued endeavours in this regard will be followed with greater success and an effective information sharing system. I wish you all the very best and thank you for providing me this opportunity to be here at your Third Annual Convention.

Thank you.

NEED FOR STRENGTHENING OF INFRASTRUCTURE SECTOR*

It is indeed a matter of pleasure and an honour for me to be here and to have the opportunity to associate myself with the 7th India-Tech Excellence Awards Function. At the outset, I congratulate the India-Tech Foundation for its commendable initiative in instituting the Awards, to acknowledge the excellent performance of the States in the development of infrastructure in the country. I am thankful to Shri Indra Mohan, President of the Foundation, for his invitation to me to give away the prestigious Awards.

The India-Tech Excellence Awards, instituted with a view to recognizing the laudable achievements of the State Governments in India in the core areas of infrastructure and capacity building, power sector reforms and initiatives, development of urban and rural infrastructure and the application of IT in State administration and governance is, no doubt, a commendable initiative to extend recognition and encouragement to those striving to address the challenges in these critical areas for the country. I am happy to note that the Foundation has been playing a pro-active role in promoting infrastructural development and technological upgradation in some of the crucial sectors through their diverse activities. I congratulate the Award-winning States which have been selected on the basis of their outstanding performance in the respective sectors. I am sure the awards given this evening will motivate other States too to achieve better results in these vital areas.

Today, all of us can be proud of the fact that our economy is one of the most resilient and the fastest growing ones in the world. We have witnessed GDP growth at a high rate in the last few years, even exceeding 9 per cent. However, the country faces numerous challenges in the form of poverty, illiteracy, poor-healthcare facilities, inadequate energy and infrastructure, unbalanced development and several other problems on the socio-political fronts. In order to face these challenges, we need to sustain the high growth of our economy and to transfer the benefits to all sections of the society. Inclusive growth and development should be our ultimate objective, for which we have to invest heavily both in men and resources and to develop our infrastructure in key sectors such as power, roads, railways, transport, telecommunications, amongst others.

* At the 7th India-Tech Excellence Awards Function, Mumbai (8 November 2008).

One of the key drivers of economic growth is the availability of adequate power. Our States have a crucial role in the generation and supply of power. Out of the total installed capacity, 52.5 per cent is in the State sector, 34 per cent in the Central sector and 13.5 per cent in the private sector. The share of the private sector is comparatively small but it is growing steadily not only in power generation but also in transmission and distribution as well.

The energy sector in our country, unfortunately, does not present a very encouraging picture. Our former President, Dr. Abdul Kalam has described it as both 'depressing and gloomy' in his book, *India 2020 (A Vision For the New Millennium)*. To quote him, 'In the 1950s India and China had roughly the same installed power capacity. Now China has roughly three times more installed capacity than India. Further, China has been consistently adding a capacity of about 15,000 MW a year for several years now whereas our capacity is growing at a rate of 2,500 MW per year.... Our vision for the electric power sector will not be complete without a major emphasis on the new sources of energies, which are clean and renewable... .'

In comparison with the rate of GDP growth, the growth in power generation has been considerably low. While GDP grew at a rate of 8-9 per cent in the last few years, the growth in power generation was considerably lower at 5.1 per cent, 7.3 per cent and 6.3 per cent for the years 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08, respectively. The corresponding shortfall in power supply has been around 9.9 per cent in 2007-08. As the economy grows, and especially with the manufacturing sector picking up momentum, the gap will increase, unless we are able to generate more.

Heavy dependence on petroleum and coal for energy needs is unsustainable in the long run due to their exhaustibility and role in global warming. It has been projected that by 2012, India's peak demand for power supply will rise to 1,57,107 MW, which is a tremendous challenge, with our present supply position being only of 90,793 MW.

Our own conventional sources of energy being meagre, therefore, it is of utmost importance that we also divert our attention and sufficient resources into the non-conventional areas like solar energy, wind energy, hydropower, geo-thermal power, tidal energy, bio-mass energy from urban and agricultural wastes, amongst others. Studies have shown that if we can develop just 1 per cent of solar potential we would be able to produce 20 times the energy derived from conventional sources. With our geographic vastness and climatic diversity — with six climate zones providing varying degrees of heat — if we are able to exploit the solar energy in a big way, in spite of initial larger capital investment, we can ensure uninterrupted power supply to every corner of the country through this source alone. Similarly, our wind energy potential

is estimated to be between 30,000 and 50,000 MW and the potential from small and mini-micro hydel projects is 10,000 MW and from bio and agricultural waste is estimated to be between 17,000 and 60,000 MW.

It is also important to pay attention to energy conservation and on improving energy efficiency. It has been estimated that more than 10,000 MW power can be saved across the country by adopting energy conservation and efficiency measures. As it is said, 'energy saved is energy produced'. We have to take effective measures to ensure that there is no wastage of energy which is generated.

There are today very positive signs suggesting that with the recent announcement to launch eight Ultra Mega Power Projects in the country and with our admission into the 'World Nuclear Club', our power sector is gearing for a fast track growth. One important thing that both the policy-makers and the industry need to keep in mind, whether it be in the case of infrastructure projects or energy sector projects, we need to go for the latest technologies available and endeavour to strictly adhere to the project deadlines. We should not allow our country to be the dumping ground for obsolete technologies. India-Tech Foundation's efforts in helping India achieve greater self-reliance for energy security is, no doubt, commendable.

Strengthening and broadening our infrastructure is required both for carrying the benefits of economic development to all parts of the country, especially to those areas which have remained largely untouched by our developmental efforts so far, as also for providing a base for further economic growth. As we know, the bulk of India's population lives in rural areas, and more than one-third of the rural habitations is not connected to all-weather roads. Electricity, clean water supply, telephone connections and other basic amenities of modern living have not reached a large number of people in rural areas. The task before us is not only to ensure that we maintain a high growth rate in our GDP, but it is equally important to ensure that the benefits of economic growth actually percolate to all sections of the people and to all parts of the country.

I hope the Government's comprehensive rural development strategy around the Four-Year Business Plan for Rural Infrastructure, known as the Bharat Nirman programme, will bear fruit and its impact will be felt by the entire country. Several schemes and projects are underway to realize the targets set in the Plan. Special projects such as those under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana are making headway in providing road connectivity to thousands of villages. With the thrust on providing strong infrastructure in rural areas, these plans have the potential to transform our rural economy in the near future which will ensure equitable growth to the benefit of all.

For balanced growth and equitable distribution of economic benefits to all sections of society, we need to ensure that the comprehensive plans evolved by the government for both urban and rural infrastructure development, are implemented earnestly. The Central Government has already initiated urban renewal plans such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme for Small and Medium Towns (UIDSSMT) and the Infrastructure Development in Mega Cities project. What is important is that these well-thought out schemes should be implemented in a time-bound manner and with special focus on the needs of the urban poor.

Friends, it is a matter of pride for all of us that India has made significant achievements in the field of information technology (IT), facilitating the IT-enabled services sector to make significant contributions to our economy. Improving our telecommunication infrastructure and spreading the application of IT in all sectors of the economy and governance institutions is crucial in sustaining growth and in taking the country into a knowledge-based society. This will enable smooth and fast flow of information and knowledge giving all classes of citizens an opportunity to gain skills and knowledge for individual advancement as also for contributing to the development of the country. In this context, we need to further develop our telecommunications infrastructure and achieve an integrated network for e-governance.

The India-Tech Foundation is known to be contributing in its own ways towards building a climate for faster economic growth in the country. Its exhibitions, conferences and seminars provide platforms for industry and the business leaders to exchange ideas and information and also provide opportunities for exploring investment avenues.

Government's policies and programmes provide crucial guidelines to the overall strategy for development. Though most of the plans and programmes are formulated, sponsored and monitored at the Central level, the role of the States is very important in the process of providing inputs to the Plans and their implementation. The initiative and responsibility for the implementation of our developmental plans and programmes lie with the States, with several Central agencies involved in assisting them. It is the duty of the States to enact appropriate legislations and constitute proper agencies and mechanisms for duly implementing the plans and projects Several States have done remarkably well in this task in recent years and others which lag behind should learn from the experience of successful States and emulate them.

What is of crucial importance here is that there should be a consensus on the imperative need and the methodology to achieve faster economic growth to the benefit of all sections of the people. Both the industry and the government owe it to them. Development should not be allowed to be made

a scapegoat of political rivalry. The country is already paying an unacceptably high price for the politics of confrontation and divisiveness and for the dangerous levels of chauvinism and intolerance almost amounting to mutual hatred being demonstrated by sections of our political class, which is tearing our country apart. It seems that the concept of India being one united, country is keeping jettisoned to serve narrow political and personal interests. Only through the committed endeavours of all sections of the society can we salvage the situation and create an environment conducive for fast and inclusive growth.

Our people across the country have a right to enjoy at least the basic minimum conditions for a dignified existence. This important right in a democracy should not be held hostage to narrow confrontational politics. Only through comprehensive development in all sectors of the economy and all concerned working together can we protect and enhance the interest of the people and the country.

Before I conclude, I once again congratulate the Award-winning States for their excellent performance in the respective sectors. I am sure their performance and achievements will inspire other States to emulate and imbibe in them a healthy competitive spirit to make efforts to surpass the standards set by them. I wish the India-Tech Foundation all success in its endeavours.

Thank you.

A NEW NATIONAL ORDER GROUNDED ON VALUES*

I feel it is a matter of honour and a privilege for me to be amidst you here and to address this distinguished gathering on the imperatives of founding a 'New National Order Grounded on Values', a subject of seminal importance to the citizens and the country as a whole, organized by the Foundation For Restoration of National Values, in association with the TATA Services, which have a long history of serving the country in different ways. Identification and nurturing of certain core nationally acceptable and universally relevant values are, indeed, crucial for us today. At a time when making more and more profit and easy and quick money by any means, seem to be the guiding principles for many of our people, whether it be in public or corporate life or in other areas, it is admirable that the TATA Services have shown interest in a scarce commodity called 'values'.

The Constitution of India, a product of the sagacity, vision and the collective wisdom of a whole generation of our nation's leadership, is an embodiment of the values that we as a nation deeply cherish. It is, indeed, a codification of our fundamental objectives and methodology as perceived by men and women endowed with a broad and inclusive national vision, respecting individual freedom and assuring the basic needs of a dignified existence.

Unfortunately, over the years, growing sections, representing practically all walks of life, more so the political class and most worrisomely, even some associated with the other vital institutions like the Judiciary, have begun to think that values and principles are dispensable attributes, giving primacy only to personal successes and achievements. Public service, including politics and other society-oriented vocations, are no longer seen as noble activities for the benefit of the people. Politics, in particular, today is seen as all about the 'art of the possible', which signifies that neither the means nor the end matters. No society can insulate itself from the consequences of such perceptions for far too long. All the major maladies our society is afflicted with today, have their roots, in my view, in the pursuit of personal agenda devoid of values and in the thinking that it is the end that matters and not the means, although they preach otherwise for public consumption.

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* Address on *A New National Order Grounded on Values* at the Foundation for Restoration of National Values, New Delhi (18 November 2008).

The ever-widening gap between precepts and practices and private and public morality have greatly contributed to the erosion of values, undermining the very nature and quality of our national life itself today.

Politics, no doubt, will reflect on the essential characteristics of the larger society itself. They both impinge upon each other in diverse ways. We have too many unrealistic critics who themselves do not want to play or recognize any pro-active role in restoring politics into the framework of an acceptable value system, but not many who want to intervene pro-actively to correct the aberrations. Everyone seems to think that it is sufficient to point out the defects in the system and be a critic only and it is someone else's responsibility to bring about the changes. Analysing the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire, the great thinker, Gibbon once said:

> When the people of Rome wanted not to give to society, but for society to give them, when the freedom they wished foremost was the freedom from responsibility, then it was that Rome ceased to be free.

Those sections of our society who question the quality and content of our national life and are becoming increasingly cynical about our political class and the public functionaries as a whole must ask themselves, 'where are we heading to as a society ?' Needless to say the present portrays an unacceptable situation, which must be changed by our collective will.

Recently, we conducted two Round Table meetings under the auspices of the Lok Sabha, involving many eminent men and women from various walks of life to deliberate upon what ails our public life and the ways and means to strengthen our parliamentary democracy. There was a large measure of consensus among the participants on the credibility gap of our leadership at every level. They were also of the view that the present-day leaders do not inspire confidence in the nation because of their apparent unconcern about ethical conduct or means in the discharge of their public function.

One remarkable feature of our struggle for freedom was the fact that it had at its helm men and women of impeccable credentials committed to larger national values. Those days, leaders lived by the ideals they preached to others and that is why our freedom struggle remained value-based influencing the people as a whole. People had genuine respect for the leaders and they had a profound faith in their sense of values and commitment to the national causes, which, unfortunately, not many among today's generation of leaders can command. The downward trend is visible at every level from the village *panchayat* to the national Parliament and other constitutional bodies even.

Today we have a fractured polity in the country, which is almost totally governed by politics of confrontation, if not hatred of each other. The country is overtaken by intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, violence, conflict and disrespect for democratic dissent, which are seriously vitiating our political life, as well as social cohesion. Such confrontational politics has made caste, creed, language, region and religion divisive issues, seeking to mould public opinion around them and sections of our political spectrum is depending on the same to get political advantage by emphasizing on issues that divide the people than what unite them. Leadership based on such dangerously divisive factors seems to be oblivious of our most cherished national values such as secularism, socialism, respect for pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance and co-existence.

What is even more worrisome is the fact that political polarization is sought in the name of sub-national, narrow and divisive identities, whose preferred language is often that of taking recourse to violence rather than the democratic and civilized methods of discussion and dialogue. Several recent incidents in our country have exhibited politicians' even so-called cultural organizations, taking recourse to violent and unethical means, which essentially depended on crime and rabid anti-social elements.

Criminals are being used to settle political scores and in the process criminals are crossing the line and entering politics. This has led to criminalisation of politics or rather to politicization of crime! The violent behaviour we see, in our legislative bodies at every level, is the result of not only the entry of people with questionable background into politics, but sections of political leadership taking recourse to questionable ends, which they believe will help them politically whatever may be the effect on the polity or people generally.

It is essential that we must, as a priority address the issues of corruption, criminalisation and communalization of politics, and the vicious role played by money power and muscle power in our political and public life. Criminalisation of politics or open violation of well-established democratic means, not only pollutes the political environment and undermines the efficacy of our democratic institutions, but also vitiate the quality of our national life itself.

One most disconcerting trend, which has emerged in recent times is that Parliament, the lofty temple of our democracy, has come to be the playground for acute confrontational and competitive politics. The malady of money power has become so deep rooted that it has even begun to intervene directly with the functioning of our core democratic institutions. It was not long ago that we had to reckon with Members who were caught in the act of receiving money for raising questions in the House, to serve vested interests, an act

which struck at the very foundation of our democratic practices. The sanctity of Parliament was desecrated in the process. The cash for queries scandal, leading to the expulsion of certain members involved in the act, has no doubt, shaken the confidence of the nation in our public life. The expulsion of 10 members of Parliament in 2005 for their involvement in the scam was a watershed event in our parliamentary history; nowhere have so many elected legislators in a national Parliament been expelled for a misdemeanour by a vote of the House. This corrective and punitive action was intended to restore people's faith in our democratic institutions. It was encouraging that most political parties and a vast majority of MPs supported the very harsh punishment to all those found guilty of such gross misdemeanour.

This won the people's resounding approval. But, even before the nation recovered from this shock, came another deadly blow to the dignity and decorum of Parliament when, some members waved wads of currency notes on the Floor of the House alleging pecuniary inducements for voting in the House. This was the day when values and Parliament as an Institution hit the nadir, the rock bottom in our public life, and undoubtedly the saddest day for every conscientious citizen.

There is today, no doubt, an all-pervading need to infuse various areas of our national life with moral values and, in this process, politics should come first. But, it is, by no means, the only area with which we should be concerned. It has affected almost all avocations unfortunately, including, if I may say so, a considerably large section of the business community and even a section of the Judiciary is also under cloud today.

Today almost, every issue, from those concerning core national values to issues of development, is subjected to the grind of contentious politics. It is essential that the political parties and others associated with the governance process and the developmental activities grow above partisan politics and demonstrate the willingness as also the sincerity to draw up and implement schemes with well-chosen priorities and devise new national approach in the larger interest of the people. Matters of vital national interest should not be made a casualty of partisan, recriminatory and destructive politics.

We are going through a phase when the resilience and adaptability of our democratic institutions are stretched too far. The people had great expectations from a free India. But in many ways their hopes and expectations have been belied by the opportunistic and wayward ways of those associated with public life and governance in the country.

To be a respectable avocation, Politics has to be based on certain essential and basic values. The nation as a whole must bring values to the centre stage of our public life. This can be achieved only if committed and conscientious

people, particularly the youth, come into the arena of politics and deal with the problems from within, which obviously cannot be done by outsiders. People blame the government for all the problems in their life but they hardly introspect. To me, shirking of responsibility is itself a reflection of the erosion of values in the society. The price we pay for political indifference is bad governance, which affects almost every aspect of our life. We cannot expect to get good governance from bad politics. Therefore, making our national life ethically and morally sound and efficient by the inclusion of committed and untainted persons in our mainstream politics is one of the most pressing needs of our times.

Today the nation is desperately groping for a political culture based on integrity and a national vision in our Parliament, the highest forum of democratic debate and civilized behaviour. We need to agree on the need and the fundamentals of value-based politics. To quote Prof. Andre Beteille, the distinguished Sociologist: 'In a parliamentary democracy, the obligations of constitutional morality are expected to be equally binding on the government and the opposition. In India, the same political party treats these obligations very differently when it is in office and when it is out of it. This has contributed greatly to the popular perception of our political system as being amoral.'

All our institutions need to demonstrate a greater degree of sensitivity and responsiveness to the growing disenchantment and apathy among our people with different aspects of our national life, particularly our political life. Divisive and communal politics will have to give way to a broad-based national political agenda. Consensus, not confrontation, has to be the basic philosophy of our political engagement.

I am, indeed, happy that the Foundation For Restoration of National Values has chosen to organize a summit on this vital issue. I am sure, its deliberations in the coming two days will be highly rewarding and help in initiating soon a nation-wide debate on the imperative of restoring our national life based on certain fundamental value system acceptable to all well-meaning people of our country.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this important Summit.

Thank you.

ENSURING SANITATION FOR HUMAN DIGNITY AND HEALTH*

I am happy to be here and to associate myself with the Closing Ceremony of the Third South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN). I am thankful to the Union Minister of Rural Development, Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, for his kind invitation to address this august gathering. I compliment the organizers of this important Conference for bringing together the Distinguished Delegates of our region on one platform to focus attention on a critical issue like sustainable sanitation, and its varied dimensions, including making it people-centric, addressing gender issues, economic gains of good sanitation and the legal aspects relating to clean environment.

Distinguished Delegates, our region, home to a substantial portion of the world population, consists of growing economies with different stages of development. Visible affluence co-exists with extreme poverty in South Asia and the people of the region are, in fact, living in different countries. In spite of our diversities, the primary aspiration that binds the countries of the region is still that of achieving an acceptable level of development as envisaged in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The seven Goals delineate a roadmap to address the critical developmental challenges before the world community and represent a global partnership to which we committed seven years ago for the welfare of our people. We pledged to govern better, and invest more in our people through health-care and education, amongst other necessities. We have already reached mid-way of the period stipulated for the realization of the Goals. The MDG Report of 2008 has noted that 'while there has been progress on several counts, important gaps still remain in delivering on the global commitments...'. To produce results, the MDGs will have to be pursued with all the seriousness they deserve, at every level of governance and by everyone involved in public-policy making at the State, national, regional or global levels.

This Conference, organized to discuss the theme *Sanitation for Dignity and Health*, is indeed a laudable effort of the South Asian region to enhance awareness about the Millennium Development Goal which targets to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to basic sanitation

* At the Closing Ceremony of the Third South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN), Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi (21 November 2008).

by 2015. Unfortunately, we are living in a world where 40 per cent of the population continues to live without basic sanitation facilities. It is a matter of great distress that an estimated 2.6 billion people, including 960 million children, have not yet gained access to improved sanitation facilities, without which there cannot be sustainable development.

Water and sanitation, the two key developmental issues for the well-being of our people, are closely inter-linked. Our efforts to provide safe drinking water to citizens is also linked to our ability to provide adequate sanitation facilities, in rural as well as in urban areas. The realization of this Goal demands sustained efforts to enhance awareness and much more commitment as also investments in providing infrastructure and even more in educating the people about changing hygiene practices. To accelerate the progress of this Millennium Development Goal, and to put this global challenge at the forefront of the international agenda, we are observing this year as the International Year of Sanitation, which has greatly impacted the sanitation movement itself.

The objective set out by the MDG on sanitation is surely achievable but the task is daunting and challenging. Though the funding needed for realizing the goal of sanitation is not large, the return on that investment is potentially much greater. Studies have established that every dollar spent on improving sanitation generates economic benefits to the tune of nine dollars. Thus, the cost of inaction is enormous and the benefits in the form of substantial reduction in diahorreal diseases and child mortality and by way of clean environment, improved health and more dignified life to our people, especially women and girls, far outweigh the cost incurred in addressing the issue.

It is acknowledged that at least the basic minimum sanitation facilities are necessary to enhance dignity, privacy and safety of all citizens, especially of women and girls. Mahatma Gandhi used to remind the people that 'cleanliness was even more important than freedom'. His dream of providing quality life to the people in the rural areas, where, as he said, India lives, is receiving special attention from our committed Rural Development Minister today, with his identification of the issue of rural sanitation coverage as a focus area of governance. The Total Sanitation Campaign comprising a massive integrated National Programme on Sanitation, involving community participation, construction related issues, hygiene education, operation and maintenance, financial management, and institution building, adopted in the year 1999, has grown over the years and today, this is perhaps the largest sanitation programme in the world.

If we look at the figures, sanitation facilities in 1983 were available to only 1 per cent of the population in rural areas and in 2001, this figure had

risen to 22 per cent of our rural population. Today, 54 per cent of the rural population has access to toilets and sanitation services. This silent revolution will make it possible for India to achieve the MDG of sanitation much ahead of the stipulated target of 2015. Almost all the districts in the country have adopted the Total Sanitation Campaign today.

It does not take more than a day to construct a toilet which may cost only Rs. 2,500 but it takes years in changing the mindset to be convinced about the need to construct one. Sanitation is not about giving subsidies; it is more about mobilizing communities, explaining to them the issues involved at the ground level, about the health hazards without it and on the benefits of good sanitation. The Total Sanitation Campaign has been successful because of the social mobilization of all the stakeholders — the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions, the non-Governmental Organisations, the Self-Help Groups, and women and children. Education also has been an integral component of this campaign as children serve as messengers to spread awareness from parents to community, which, in turn, creates the demand for sanitation.

Sanitation, as all of us would acknowledge, is the key to healthy living, which contributes to well-being. It is essential for our children as it affects their development and future as well. Every day more than 5,000 children die the world over because of diahorreal diseases caused through unhygienic living conditions and contaminated water. It is a disturbing reality and our society should be sufficiently sensitized about the gravity of the problem as such large-scale casualty among children largely go unnoticed in different parts of the world including in our own region. Inadequate sanitation facilities have also been one of the major reasons for girl dropouts from the schools. Though the sanitation services in Indian schools have increased from 8 per cent in 1993 to 65 per cent currently, we should not rest content till we achieve a hundred per cent target. Only through basic hygiene education at an early age, can our children grow up with an acceptable sense of hygiene.

Not only is good sanitation vital for healthy living it also contributes to social development and is also a good economic investment besides helping to clean the environment. The solid and liquid waste management, associated with sanitation promotion can generate revenue and employment for millions, particularly in toilet construction, waste recycling, biogas plants for energy use, and the list is endless.

Two of the principal agents in India who have contributed significantly towards the remarkable progress in this sector in recent years, are the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs) and the non-Governmental Organisations who together have played a very proactive role in bringing about both awareness and the infrastructure. The Nirmal Gram Puraskar (NGP) (Award for clean village) programme initiated in 2003, is a laudable initiative with

tremendous potential to change the quality of life in our villages for the better. The quantum jump in the number of *Panchayats*, from 40 in 2003 to 11140 in 2008, selected for the Award, speaks volumes about the efficacy and receptivity of the programme. These *Panchayats* have, in fact, become role models in their areas of jurisdiction for achieving hundred per cent sanitation and have motivated other *Panchayats* in transforming into clean and healthy villages.

It should be among the primary concern of all governments to provide every citizen access to at least minimum sanitation facilities within the shortest possible time. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, observed in the early years of our Freedom 'the day every one of us gets a toilet to use, I shall know that India has reached the pinnacle of progress'. Though what Pt. Nehru had envisioned long ago is far from a reality, yet, the growth from 1 per cent to 54 per cent, over a period of two and a half decades, is a long journey of the sanitation movement in India which could not have been possible without the involvement of our rural population in the Total Sanitation Campaign. The contributions of some of the committed NGOs like the Ramakrishna Mission, Gram Vikas, Mahila Samakhya, Safai Vidyalaya and Sulabh International deserve our appreciation. I am sure, the other countries of the region will also be able to benefit from the initiative of such groups.

Distinguished Delegates, members of Parliament are powerful agents of social change in a democracy because they are the people who legislate, influence policy-making, build priorities for the Government and perform the monitoring role as the representatives of the people. Members of Parliament represent a sizeable population and their initiatives can have great impact on the people. Thus it becomes imperative that every member should take the responsibility to actively support the sanitation movement in their respective constituencies. They must strive for well-maintained sanitation and hygienic facilities in schools or public places in their jurisdictions. They must also interact with the NGOs and citizen groups working in this sector regularly to accelerate the sanitation drive. The parliamentarians in India are allocated a separate fund to the tune of Rs. 2 crore every year, under a special scheme called, the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, for small developmental works in their respective constituencies. I would suggest that so long as the scheme continues the members should use a part of this fund to prioritize sanitation services.

Friends, we all are aware how crucial the conservation of natural resources in general and water resources in particular are. It has grown in importance with crisis after crisis afflicting the majority of living beings in our countries and the world as a whole. A tragic news report about a 12 year old boy's death in a stampede where people fought for a few litres of water from a

tanker in Delhi in May 2005 stirred me personally. I felt, we, the elected representatives of the people, can do our bit in the nation's effort to solve the problems arising due to water crisis. Everyone in our region, in fact, across the world, should recognize the importance of rain water harvesting to meet the water requirement for sanitation and other purposes. As part of our efforts to sensitize the parliamentarians on the issue and with a view to identifying problems relating to water and ways of involving Members of Parliament in conservation and augmentation of water resources in their respective States/Constituencies and to create awareness for conservation and efficient management of water, we have constituted a Parliamentary Forum on Water Conservation and Management in August 2005. The Forum also provides a platform to the civil society organisations, who earlier did not have access to Members to engage with them and to provide information so that the Members understand the extent and impact of lack of safe drinking water and the importance of hygiene. These initiatives certainly will have their impact in addressing the various problems of this sector.

Friends, the sanitation movement has gained momentum as it should and its further progress requires NGOs and citizen groups' cooperation, public-private partnership, community involvement, advocacy and awareness by all the stakeholders. We cannot achieve 100 per cent results overnight but we must persist with our efforts and sustain the campaign. It would be a sorry state of affairs if the *Panchayats* who have been awarded *Nirmal Gram Puraskar* return to their old habits. Thus, what is required is social mobilization and sustained efforts to ensure that once introduced to, everyone follows good sanitation practices in the rural areas.

The Delegates to this Conference have given their valuable suggestions for a better policy framework to address the issue of sanitation, country-specific and region-specific and have discussed the best practices prevalent in various countries and I am confident that your deliberations will translate into a passionate commitment to give further boost to the sanitation movement in the South Asian Region. To implement the New Delhi Declaration, which this Conference has adopted, we must first believe that 100 per cent sanitation is achievable in our region and acknowledge that the three keys to reach that target are information, education and commitment.

With these words, I once again thank the organizers of the SACOSAN for providing me this opportunity to be here with you all today.

Thank you.

HONOURING YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS*

I am extremely happy to join the distinguished gathering at the function this evening for the grant of 'ERNST & YOUNG' Entrepreneur of the Year 2008-09 Award. I thank Shri Rajiv Memani, for giving me the opportunity to be here. I heartily congratulate all the recipients of the Award this evening and wish them all success in their endeavours, present and future.

This prestigious Award, which recognizes and celebrates the success of entrepreneurs for their dynamism and achievements, has emerged as the World's Business Award. Over the years, the EOY Award Programme, has extended recognition to many highly accomplished entrepreneurs.

Ever since the Award has been introduced in India in 1999, it has enhanced its profile by recognizing the contributions of farsighted, creative and enterprising personalities who have inspired many others with their vision, leadership and achievements. I sincerely compliment Ernst and Young for instituting the Award with the objective of rewarding entrepreneurs, who stand out among their peers.

Friends, post-Independence India has seen commendable changes in its socio-economic profile which have been made possible due to the 'entrepreneurial synergy' of two different ages—the robust, tenacious, visionary entrepreneurs of the likes of Tatas and Birlas, and the vibrant and globally competitive entrepreneurs of New India based on the knowledge industries, together with the IT-enabled Services, the Service sector, the pharmaceutical and the entertainment sectors. With the collective efforts of all of them and with the right kind of support and encouragement from the Government, we have been able to put in place a liberal, competitive, efficient and open economy in our country today.

The process of liberalization and globalization, started with the objective of ensuring macro-economic stability as also for spurring our momentum of growth through concerted efforts of creating an enhanced investment climate, competitiveness and optimized economic output, which, in turn, is expected to address our developmental challenges, has, no doubt, started showing its impact on our country.

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* At the 'ERNST & YOUNG' Entrepreneur of the Year Award Programme, Mumbai (26 November 2008).

The blend of State-engineered socio-economic changes and individual entrepreneurial acumen and initiatives has resulted in a new and resurgent India, which is achieving consistently impressive economic growth, and is socially and culturally vibrant, and ready to take its rightful place in the comity of nations with a new sense of purpose and confidence today. This new confidence and the visible changes in our economic activity are largely due to the bold initiatives and reforms in areas like infrastructure development, public-private partnership and a host of factors like a congenial investment climate, enriched human resource development programme, and, of course, the dynamism of our corporate sector. Today, Indian companies which, only a few years back were mainly India-centric, are taking over foreign companies and business and a new sense of confidence has been generated in our business houses to go abroad and make their presence felt in the world arena. I salute the Indian entrepreneurs for all their achievements and for making us proud. I am sure they are also fully aware of their responsibility to the society.

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is of great significance *vis-a-vis* the process of our social and economic transformation. CSR is fundamentally about building a mutually rewarding relationship between the corporate sector and the society as a whole. It is necessary that the entrepreneurs should evolve methods to ensure the effectiveness of this 'partnership in progress' with the Government for realizing the objective of a better standard of living for our people. As we continue to undertake developmental programmes, we recognize that there are myriad challenges before us, more so with regard to achieving the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations for all member-countries by 2015. Only if the political leadership and the entrepreneurs of our country work together can we achieve this laudable objective. I am confident that by ushering in a new system of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, Rule of Law, social sensitivity, ethical conduct, value for the precious human resources and sensitivity to the environmental issues, we will undoubtedly go a long way in promoting the interests of the people generally and in particular, of our business fraternity.

The global financial meltdown being experienced today is, no doubt, a matter of concern for everybody—the government, the business community and the common people of our country. The crisis in the United States, which triggered the meltdown, has started showing its spillover effects on the world economy, which is more integrated today than ever before.

I am, however, confident that with the very resilience and the sound fundamentals of our economy we will be able to withstand the shock. A healthy financial system mainly based on our public sector financial institutions and reasonable level of insularity maintained by our economy

and a cautious approach adopted by our policy-makers should help our economy tide over the crisis. Our entrepreneurs and the dynamic private sector, along with the major public sector undertakings, possess all the ingredients that are needed to turn every challenge before them into a success and expedite the process of economic transformation. I urge all of you to ensure that along with the health of the corporate entities, the interests of the workers are duly protected and that there is no laying off of employees as that could only exacerbate the situation, leading to distress and demoralization among our highly qualified and competent workforce.

Friends, the continuation of one-and-a-half decades of economic reforms in our country under which, the private sector in tandem with the public sector has created a plethora of opportunities to our entrepreneurs — a new climate of investment and growth, sound policies adopted for the rejuvenation of our country, a creative human-resources force, and the other economic fundamentals, are being put in place. As I said earlier, it is quite heartening that many indigenous companies of India, have, of late, taken over reputed MNCs and their success stories are going up with every passing year. When I look beyond our country, I am filled with a sense of pride that many Indians settling abroad are at the helm of affairs in the top-class corporate houses abroad.

Those who have been the recipients of the Ernst and Young's 'Entrepreneur of the Year Award' in the past had achieved success by their hard work, creativity, endurance, passion and courage. Like successful 'entrepreneurs', we need people with enthusiasm and commitment in different spheres of our national life, including politics. We need people with the proper will, determination and probity to make a difference in our over-all national affairs. It is not enough to be critical of the aberrations in the different areas of our national life and remain inactive or indifferent to them. Well-meaning, enterprising and committed people should come forward and make responsible contributions for addressing those aberrations.

I am sure the Winners of the Award in various categories will inspire many more entrepreneurs to achieve excellence and work in partnership with the State to facilitate the development of the India of our dream. My very best wishes to all of them in their future endeavours.

I thank Ernst and Young and Shri Rajiv Memani for providing me with this opportunity to be part of tonight's important programme.

Thank you.

SIXTY YEARS OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS*

It is indeed a matter of honour and a privilege for me to have the opportunity to associate myself with the Human Rights Day Function organized by the National Human Rights Commission, specially when we are observing the completion of sixty years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document that seeks to extend 'dignity and justice' to every citizen all over the world. This provides us all an occasion to ponder the course of action to be adopted when the right to life of millions of people is under threat because of the growing incidents of terrorism taking place in different parts of the world.

Fundamental human rights are universal and inalienable and all people in the world are entitled to enjoy them without discrimination on the ground of race, colour, sex, ethnicity, age, language, religion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status. Life of inherent liberty, equality and dignity can only provide the basic foundation of freedom with justice and peace in the world. It is a matter of utmost concern that disregard and contempt of human rights are being indulged in various areas, which outrage the conscience of humankind.

Realizing that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly sixty years ago, at a time when the two World Wars had ravaged the world and the humanity at large was in despair. The thirty Articles enumerated in the Declaration are comprehensive in nature and lay the foundation to provide a dignified existence to all law-abiding citizens. The uniqueness of the Declaration lies in the fact that it represents a world-wide Charter of Rights which transcend national, religious, cultural and ideological factors.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was neither an international treaty nor an agreement and hence did not impose any legal obligations. It was only after about two decades of its adoption that the Declaration was

* Keynote Address at the function to mark the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), New Delhi (10 December 2008).

strengthened with legal force when the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966. Today, these two Covenants, along with the Universal Declaration, constitute the International Bill of Human Rights which, along with various other instruments relating to the rights of vulnerable groups have definitely created worldwide awareness about and concern for human rights.

It was a significant coincidence that around the time when the UN General Assembly was drafting the UDHR, the Constituent Assembly of independent India was deliberating upon the country's Draft Constitution. It was, therefore, quite natural that the ethos of our national liberation movement and the global community's concern for human rights were manifested in our Constitution. The Preamble to our Constitution encapsulates the essence of human rights in all its manifestations. Apart from the preambulatory promises for 'Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', the traditional civil and political rights were incorporated as Fundamental Rights in Part-III of our Constitution, while the social, economic and cultural rights were included in Part-IV as the Directive Principles of State Policy.

Even the human rights in the form of group rights, such as the abolition of the practice of untouchability, prohibition of employment of children in factories or mines or in any hazardous conditions, affirmative state action for the advancement of women and children and other vulnerable sections, appointment of National Commissions for the protection of the rights and interests of sections of the population who were perceived to be in need of special protection, found expression in some of our constitutional provisions.

Our official human rights institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Women, the National Commission for Minorities, the State Human Rights Commissions and the Commission for Backward Classes have been playing catalytic role not only in creating people's awareness of human rights but also in sensitizing our administrative and law-enforcement machineries to human rights. There is no denying that today the human rights movement in our country has got a fillip due to the concern and response shown by all these institutions for the protection and promotion of rights of the vulnerable sections in our society.

Though the autonomous institutions like the independent Judiciary, free Media, the civil society groups and the multi-party system have been making significant contributions towards protecting and promoting human rights in our country, the role played by our legislative institutions, particularly our Parliament in this direction is, indeed, commendable. It has been responsible for putting in place several legislations of far-reaching effect in this regard.

The most significant landmark in our efforts to protect human rights, has been the enactment of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, under which the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the State level Commissions have been established with the mandate to protect, promote, observe and study human rights as specified under the Constitution as also under the International Covenants which have been ratified by India. Vested with the power to take *suo motu* cognizance of the instances of breach of human rights and also empowered to make judicial enquiries, these Commissions have been engaged in a commendable job in ensuring human rights of the citizens.

The creation of the National Human Rights Commission marked the beginning of a new era of humane governance in India. In fact, the NHRC has received popular recognition as an indispensable institution of governance due to its proactive efforts to maintain the standard of integrity, efficiency and probity in its functioning. Consequently, it now enjoys great moral authority and the responses to its recommendations by the agencies concerned are overwhelming. One of the significant achievements of the NHRC is in spreading human rights awareness among various sections of society. It has also been playing a supportive role for the country's Apex Court which has been remitting to the NHRC certain complex issues having serious human rights implications. Being an important corrective institution of governance, the NHRC, no doubt, has set a shining example for other institutions of governance.

Human rights have no meaning if there is no sustainable human development to eliminate poverty, promote human dignity and rights, and provide equal opportunities for all through good governance. This is of particular relevance in the context of the on-going process of globalization and its potential for excluding and marginalizing the weaker sections and people with limited resources. It is essential that efforts to promote human rights must afford protection to all who face exclusion and marginalisation. Development, which encompasses within its fold the social, economic and political milieu, is only possible in the real sense of the term, if poverty is eradicated, which is the biggest threat and challenge for human rights and the single-most debilitating factor that has prevented people from realizing their full potential.

Unfortunately, the fruits of development have failed to reach all our citizens in the same proportion and, as a result, inequality is continuously growing along with the gap between the haves and the have-nots. We must ensure that the fruits of development will reach every section of the people equitably. We need to have vested interest in promoting inclusive democracy in place of diversities—be it religious, cultural or linguistic, reinforced by a

commitment to protect their rights and interests against intrusions of all kinds. The rights and opportunities enjoyed by every individual make democracy distinct. But, most disconcertingly, our country now is witnessing a growing tendency to promote sectarianism and divisiveness among our people for narrow sectarian interest which undermines democracy and which will create conditions for the infringement of human rights. Thus, there is an urgent need for making human rights education an integral part of our formal education system at all levels—schools, colleges and Universities, which will help build a universal culture of human rights through imparting knowledge and skills and through moulding attitudes.

One important aspect of human rights is the right to education, which is the most potent mechanism for the advancement of human beings. The Right to Education is also recognized as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The realization of this human right can be achieved only through free and compulsory primary education. With the enactment of the Constitution (93rd Amendment) Act, 2002, we in India have made education for the children in the age group of 6 to 14 years a Fundamental Right in the eyes of law, but its actual operationalization is yet to be done through an enabling legislation. It is hoped that with the introduction of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2008 in the current Session of Parliament, a long cherished dream of right to education, particularly in the case of children from the weaker sections and disadvantaged groups who are unable to enjoy their human rights, will be fulfilled.

Even after centuries of experiments with democracy which is based on universal franchise, liberty and equality, women continue to be discriminated all over the world and are subject to many forms of human rights violations. Crimes against women, which are increasing exponentially are, in fact, crimes against humanity. Our Constitution confers on men and women equal rights and opportunities in political, social and economic spheres and it is essential that all steps should be taken to facilitate women's empowerment in real terms, apart from reservation of seats in our higher representative bodies.

Another area of concern is the continued violation of the rights of children, particularly those belonging to the vulnerable sections of our society, who are often subjected to sexual abuse, torture, violence, deprivation, denial and bonded labour. Exploitation of children for extracting labour and the malnutrition experienced by sizeable sections among them are grim realities of our society, for which it is essential that extant laws should be vigorously implemented with new enactments as may be required to ensure the comprehensive protection of the rights of children against exploitation and for enjoyment of their childhood.

Friends, for quite some time we have been passing through deeply troubled times with the pervasive threat of terrorism casting its menacing shadow on our efforts to promote and protect human rights. India has been repeatedly targeted and the recent terrorist attack in Mumbai was only yet another grim reminder of the gravity of the threat we are facing. Today, the spectre of terrorism, which is a natural enemy of human rights, is haunting the people globally. Terrorism anywhere hinders development and results in a grave violation of human rights. It is not merely a heinous criminal act, it is an assault on democracy and civilized society. Needless to say, targeting innocent and defenseless people is the most reprehensible act and violation of a human being's basic right to life and security.

In a constitutional democracy such as ours, the Judiciary is an important organ of the State for the enforcement of rights and realization of relief through remedial jurisprudence. Of late, there has been a great trend of vigorous legal activism in certain areas concerning human rights. There are many instances where the Judiciary played a catalytic role in its quest for justice which resulted in a vast expansion of the frontiers of public law and formulation of multi-dimensional legal strategies, including public interest litigations for providing access to justice.

However, one should ponder as to how many people can afford to have or have easy access to Courts. Further, delayed justice strikes at the root of human rights, specially in the case of the underprivileged and vulnerable sections of society. The Supreme Court has frequently held that fair and speedy trial is an integral part of fundamental rights of the citizens to 'equal protection of law'. Delayed justice is essentially denial of justice to the litigants. It is, therefore, essential that the Judiciary strives for expeditious delivery of justice and also make available easy and inexpensive justice to the citizens.

The human rights movement in India has come a long way and a number of human rights centred-legislations have been enacted during the last six decades, which all should be sincerely implemented. In India, the human rights challenges that need to be addressed very urgently lie in the areas of child care, child labour, child education, child abuse, bonded labour, trafficking in women, the protection of minorities and weaker sections of society and even environmental rights. Unless respect for fundamental human rights remain a bed-rock on which governance is based, no progress is possible in the real sense of the term, as development can be sustained only through due respect for human rights. The Media and the civil society organizations should play a very important role in creating human rights awareness and in bringing violation of human rights to the fore for remedial action.

The international community's quest for human development has received tremendous impetus with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emanating from the historic Millennium Declaration adopted by 189 countries at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. In fact, human rights and MDGs have much in common. They share guiding principles such as participation, empowerment and national ownership; they serve as tools for reporting processes that can hold governments responsible and accountable; and most fundamentally, they share the ultimate objective of promoting human well-being and honouring the inherent dignity of all people. All national and international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals must, therefore, be made in conformity with the objective of realizing human rights without any discrimination whatsoever.

Friends, democracy, development and respect for human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Protecting democratic values, maintaining the Rule of Law and, at the same time, promoting the human rights are the most fundamental requirements of a civilized existence, which remain the inalienable goals of any democracy. Though we have succeeded in establishing the largest democracy in the world, we have not yet been able to fully realize and protect the rights of our citizens which are essential prerequisites for our democracy to flourish. The need of the hour is to develop a culture of respect for human rights at every level of governance and civil society in the country.

It is gratifying that the National Human Rights Commission has been entrusted with an enormous responsibility in this regard and I am extremely glad to acknowledge their commendable endeavours in this direction. I am grateful to Hon'ble Justice Rajendra Babu for the opportunity provided to me to associate myself with this important function. My best wishes are with them for carrying on their quest to protect and ensure human rights to all our citizens.

I also wish to thank the Hon'ble Minister of Communications for the release of the postage stamp on this occasion, which will always remind the people of the great civilizing role played by the National Human Rights Commission.

Thank you.

SUSTAINABILITY AND DEVELOPMENTAL PRIORITIES*

It gives me immense pleasure to be amidst you all at the '3rd Sustainability Summit: Asia 2008'. I am grateful to Shri Y.C. Deveshwar, Chairman, CII-ITC Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development Advisory Council, for his initiative and leadership in organizing this Summit and for giving me the opportunity to associate myself with this event. I greatly appreciate the vision and the concerted efforts of all those spearheading the CII-ITC Centre of Excellence for Sustainability Development (CESD) to develop the requisite capability among Indian Industry by taking several pro-active measures to promote the process of sustainable development while retaining its competitiveness.

The goal of sustainability is of special significance to us in view of the prevalence of large-scale deprivation and inequality in access to developmental benefits, more likely to intensify in the context of the current financial crisis which has, in fact, brought in sharper focus the question of sustainability *vis-a-vis* our developmental priorities and strategies. I sincerely hope that the Summit will provide solution for maintaining compatibility between material progress and the sustainability of development—social, economic and environmental. The spectre of climate change is looming large over the world and its effects have also started impacting on our social, economic and environmental spheres. Shrinking of glaciers and melting of ice-sheets have posed a serious threat to human settlement. Seasonal and terrestrial ecosystem changes have resulted in inequitable water distribution and affected rainfall patterns, hampering agricultural productivity. Besides, many new water-borne and vector-borne infections have started emerging, posing new challenges to our health-care preparedness. Above all, it has made a dent on our bio-diversity, the essence of the sustenance of our ecosystem.

If we have perpetual poverty and a life of inhuman existence, industrialization and urbanization will have to be seen from the perspective of human concerns. The challenge is to find development strategies that improve the living standards, create employment, and promote opportunities and which, at the same time, are environment friendly. Regrettably, the developed world has failed in its commitment to transfer green technology

* As the 3rd Sustainability Summit: Asia 2008, New Delhi (11 December 2008).

and additional finance to the developing countries. In such a scenario, we have to find the most appropriate technology that can make development possible while promoting and preserving the environment.

India has proven competence for business model innovation in health, telecom and small-scale products and services. Moving this to the global marketplace could gain enormous competitive advantage to Indian companies. The transition will require radical transformation of the strategies of the corporate world with lot more farsightedness and unraveling the untapped markets existing in different challenges. There are many companies which have generated business from 'waste to wealth' concept. Then there are some who have found a market by providing rechargeable solar LED lamps, an affordable and durable solution to a long-standing issue and replace traditional kerosene-based lamps that are polluting and hugely inefficient. Around two billion people around the world are using kerosene. That's 20 per cent of the global lighting costs, delivering 0.2 per cent of the output. In Kerala, they have packaged Ayurveda and Tourism and created an industry which is providing employment to many people.

According to the Task Force Report of the Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Resources, India produces, in its *talukas*, 400 million tons/year of agricultural residue which can produce 53000 MW of power. Even if half of this is possible, coupled with the large scale wind energy production, which holds a potential of 45000 MW, India can develop into an energy secure nation. Less than 40 per cent of the households in India have tap water connections which again is a chance for the business to reach 600 million people. Investment potential for decentralized water purification systems, itself, exceeds US$ 10 billion. There are enormous opportunities for contributing towards building a dependable health-care infrastructure for our people. All these have to be accomplished with innovations in strategy, in planning, in processes, in designing, and in delivery, without ignoring the environmental sensibilities and, above all, with sincere commitment to the people's causes.

Mahatma Gandhi, had once observed, 'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed'. The motto of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs should guide us in our developmental activities. The traditional business management theory that 'there is only one responsibility of business: to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits' needs to be given an urgent rethink and an overhaul. The paradigm of development and economic growth needs to be transformed, keeping in mind the ecological concerns and value-laden business practices.

Despite all the encouraging talks about economic growth that averaged about 6 per cent annually, across the Asia-Pacific region in recent years, it is indeed an unpalatable fact that millions of people still live in absolute poverty, surviving on less than one dollar a day. A study conducted by the Asian Development Bank has pointed out that the rich are getting richer and faster, than the poor in developing Asia as disparities in standards of living continue to widen in this one of the most dynamic regions in the world. The ADB report has expressed fear that in societies where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, there is danger of policy levers being captured by the rich for their own benefit and a weakening of the institutional foundations of the growth process. These findings may further aggravate due to the forecast of recession in advanced economies and the slow growth rate in the Asian nations due to global meltdown.

Friends, India, with a billion-plus population, is endowed with a vast reservoir of resources—natural and human—and is steadily moving into the world domain as a major economic and political force. Nonetheless, we have many challenges to reckon with, both on the domestic and the international fronts. Amidst all the talks of high economic growth, rapid industrialization and phenomenal scientific progress, including the Mission to Moon, we are besieged with the problems of poverty, poverty-induced social hazards, food insecurity, water-conflicts, energy shortages, unemployment, lack of health-care facilities, inadequate infrastructure, unbalanced social, economic and political growth, environmental degradation, etc. Notwithstanding all the plans and programmes initiated in the aftermath of Independence with a view to ameliorating the lot of our people, we still have 26 per cent of our population living below the poverty line and rank 127th in the World Human Development Index. We are already becoming the world's third largest source of greenhouse gases. Some of the Indian cities are among the most polluted in the world today. While these are some of the domestic challenges, issues such as climate change, the menace of global terrorism and financial crisis are adding to the trouble with varying but significant impact on the country's development. The imbalance in the economy has to be corrected if India has to truly become an important player in world affairs. We can turn these challenges into remarkable opportunities, if the country as a whole works together, discarding the ways of negative and confrontational politics, to achieve sustainable development, ensuring ecological efficiency and broadly inclusive growth.

As a vital component of the society, the corporate world, which is immensely benefited by the former, is under obligation to give back to the society its due. Our entrepreneurs in both the corporate organizations and in their individual capacities should turn these challenges into opportunities by meticulously making use of their vision, innovation, state-of-the-art technology

and perseverance. They should imbibe the principle of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and fulfil their obligation towards the people. Besides, there is an urgent need to have a re-look at business competitiveness which, even while enhancing its profitability and share-holders' values, creating wealth and pursuing opportunities for growth, can also ensure the sustainability of business itself from all other angles as has been proved by the ITC Limited. As an Indian, I am proud to know that the ITC is a 'carbon positive' and 'water positive' company, besides being able to achieve 100 per cent recycling of solid waste in many of its operations and I sincerely compliment both the management and the employees of the ITC for their splendid achievements and contribution to sustainable development.

I hope and trust that all the stakeholders in our national life—the Government, corporate houses, individual entrepreneurs, members of the civil society, and the people in general, will come forward in promoting sustainable development. This calls for a new perception of competitiveness that can create the possibility for sustainable development and long-lasting competitiveness. The corporate houses should associate themselves with programmes like 'social forestry', eco-tourism, and promote the use of bio-diesel among our common people and entrepreneurs. They should commit themselves to green technology by complying with the norms of 'water positive', 'carbon-positive' and almost absolute recycling of solid waste contents. They can bank upon the unconventional sources of energy like solar energy, wind energy, ocean energy, bio-gas energy, etc. in undertaking their industrial activities.

The Parliament and the Government will have to continue to make every possible endeavour to promote economic growth while sustaining the ecology. Today we have in place a National Action Plan on Climate Change, focusing attention on eight priority National Missions namely, solar energy, enhanced energy efficiency, sustainable habitat, conserving water, sustaining the Himalayan eco-system, a 'Green India', sustainable agriculture and strategic knowledge platform for climate change. Environmental considerations are increasingly being integrated into the planning, designing and implementation of our developmental programmes.

I would like to share with this distinguished gathering some of the developments in this regard at the parliamentary level. Our Parliament, as the highest deliberative and legislative body, has been giving serious attention to this problem and only last year the Lok Sabha had about four-and-a-half-hour long debate on global warming. Our Parliament's Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Science and Technology and Environment and Forests has been constantly evaluating the functioning of the Ministries concerned. I have also taken several initiatives to make our elected representatives more

aware of the imperative of ecological conservation and sustainable development. I have constituted a Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change and another one on Water Conservation and Management, besides the Forum on Youth, Forum on Children and the Forum on Population and Public Health with a view to equipping the Members of Parliament with adequate information and knowledge about issues and developments in these vital areas. We have been organizing Lectures by subject experts on topical interest for the benefit of the Members since 2005. The Lectures by global environmental activists like the former US Vice-President and Nobel Laureate Mr. Al Gore, Dr. R.K. Pachauri and Dr. Sunita Narayan, among others, were indeed, eye-openers to the gravity of the challenges that the world community is facing on the environmental front today. I am happy to say that water harvesting and water conservation systems have been put in place in Parliament Complex as well as at my official residence. These measures have, no doubt, gone a long way in sensitizing the members of Parliament on the imperative of sustainable development.

Friends, today we have an opportunity to be the world leader in the movement for ensuring competitive and sustainable development, drawing the rest of the world—including the developed part—into this process of transition in the developmental path, helping to create a mutually profitable relationship between countries in this endeavour. India's vast resources and potential for the sustainability market can be utilized to achieve this objective.

As we struggle to provide a better standard of living to our people, our commitment to protect environment remains as strong as before. The 21st Century is being hailed as an Asian century and India is poised to be one of the robust engines of growth and a leading player in the emerging global economic and political order. It speaks of our sincerity and commitment that despite our developmental imperatives, we have pledged that our per capita Green House Gas emissions will not exceed the per capita GHG emissions of the developed countries. We must work together to make growth inclusive and both the public and private sectors must build a partnership to find out new economic activities and industrial enterprises to generate employment opportunities that do not overlook or bypass the poor. I am sure, the CESD, in concert with India Incorporated, civil society groups and individual entrepreneurs will continue its efforts ceaselessly in maintaining a fine balance between material progress and sustainability of natural resources, a challenging but rewarding responsibility. I am glad you have chosen to spend two days at this thought-provoking Summit. The corporate world should use this opportunity to comprehend and deliberate how you, as part of the world's largest and most vibrant democracy, could play a leadership role in the radical transformation to sustainability.

I would like to once again express my thanks to Shri Y.C. Deveshwar for giving me the opportunity to share some of my views on such a vital issue having bearing on our people and our environment. I also compliment the organizers of this Summit who have taken so much care to make this event a great success.

Thank you.

WAKF: AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC UPLIFT OF MUSLIMS*

I am happy to be amidst you all at this Valedictory Session of this important Conference on Wakf organised by the Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, who is also the Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Wakf. The Committee has submitted a comprehensive report covering all aspects of the problems of Wakf administration in the country and I am sure this Conference has deliberated on the same regarding the protection and better utilization of Wakf properties.

In a country of over a billion plus people, belonging to different religions, Muslims constitute over 13 per cent of the population. That being so, their progress and prosperity is a necessary prerequisite for the overall socio-economic transformation of our country. In the last sixty years of Independence, with committed efforts of our people and the Government at different levels, our country has made substantial progress in various spheres. However, as we all are aware, the Muslim community, the single largest minority community, and certainly a vital component of our country, has not been able to be equal beneficiaries which certainly calls for serious introspection and deliberation.

It is commendable that the Central Wakf Council, as reconstituted in March 2005 is playing an important role in the development of the Muslim society by way of implementing two vital schemes, namely, the development of Wakf Properties and the educational advancement of the Muslim community. Wakf is a vital instrument of socio-economic uplift of the Muslims. Hence, the effective functioning of the institution of Wakf will go a long way in contributing to the progress of a substantial segment of our society and the strengthening of the secular edifice of our country which we all deeply cherish.

The Sachar Committee Report, submitted in November 2006, has estimated that there is six lakh acres of land under the Wakf, the market value of which can be put at around Rs. 1.2 lakh crore. The Report has further noted that if these Wakf properties were 'put to efficient and marketable use, they can generate a minimum return of 10 per cent which is about Rs. 12,000 crore per annum'. These properties, worth thousands of crores of rupees, unfortunately,

* At the Valedictory Session of the Conference on Wakf, New Delhi (20 December 2008).

have not been fully utilized for the benefit of the Muslim community, the main purpose for which they were endowed and thereby the country as a whole has lost. If such a huge amount of money is meaningfully utilized for the development of the community—for education, poverty eradication, employment, etc.—I am sure that will substantially elevate the status of the community in the overall national index.

The present Joint Parliamentary Committee on Wakf constituted in January 2006 by the Hon'ble Chairman, Rajya Sabha, in consultation with me as the Speaker of Lok Sabha, has already presented as many as nine reports, the last being the one presented to the Parliament on 23 October 2008. I heartily compliment Shri K. Rahman Khanji, Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, for providing invaluable leadership and inspiring guidance to the Committee.

The latest report of the JPC on Wakf is a comprehensive one covering all aspects of its terms of reference in which the Committee has made wide-ranging recommendations on specific areas. These positive recommendations, if implemented expeditiously can have tremendous impact on the country's welfare.

It is a matter of deep concern that a substantial section of the Muslim community is still steeped in poverty and deprivation. The low level of education of the community, to my mind, has greatly aggravated the plight of the community. The representation of Muslims in the public services—civil or defence—and also at various levels of decision-making processes is not commensurate with their numerical strength, and this injustice has to be corrected sooner than later. It is the responsibility of the Government and also of all of us to ensure that the benefits of various schemes and programmes meant for the minorities reach them so that no section of our population lags behind in any area of development.

Several positive initiatives have been forthcoming from the government in recent years to address the problems associated with the intended benefits of development not reaching every section of the community, particularly those belonging to our minority communities. Today we have a separate Ministry at the Union level and also the National Commission for Minorities to promote and look after the interests of the minority communities in the country. The new 15-point Programme specifically intends to ameliorate the lot of the minority communities in India, who form one of the most important segments of our population. The Programme, amongst others, provides for exclusive schemes for the development of minorities, steps to be taken for improving their educational status and enabling better access to credit. I trust that all these measures will go a long way in enhancing the deserving status of our minority communities and in empowering them socially, economically and politically.

Today, there is undoubtedly a need for all sections of our society—the civil society, the media, the bureaucracy, the leaders of political parties and the community members themselves—to come forward and work together to ensure that the benefits of developmental schemes reach every section so that, all our people together are able to enjoy their legitimate rights and to contribute constructively towards strengthening our country and thus for taking it forward in every respect. Having a fully inclusive democracy should be our priority which can come about only when all sections of our people feel that they are equal stakeholders in the nation's progress and prosperity. I am sure this Conference on Wakf has come out with constructive suggestions to facilitate that process, including advancement of the Muslim Community's interests through the meaningful utilization of the Wakf Properties.

The valuable suggestions coming out of your long experience in executing the Wakf Act, would, I hope, be taken into account by the executing agencies in the light of the recommendations made by the JPC. Your deliberations I am sure, would help in sensitizing the administrators for managing the Wakf matters more effectively and contribute towards generating awareness among the general public which would strengthen the community as a whole.

I would call upon all the agencies involved in Wakf administration including the Union and the State Governments to carefully study the Committee's suggestions and recommendations for implementing them in right earnest.

Before I conclude, I would once again like to compliment Shri K. Rahman Khanji, Hon'ble Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, and Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Wakf, for taking this commendable initiative in organizing the Conference on Wakf, which has been a great success.

Thank you.

CRISES TODAY AND THE FUTURE OF CAPITALISM*

I feel privileged to have the opportunity to attend the Tenth D.T. Lakdawala Memorial Lecture delivered by one of the most outstanding economists in the world, Prof. Stiglitz, who is a household name, specially in the developing countries. I compliment the Institute of the Social Sciences with which Dr. Lakdawala had very close association as its first Chairman, for organizing the Lecture. Professor D. T. Lakdawala was unquestionably a great economist and a quintessential nationalist. Endowed as he was with a deep concern for social and economic justice, Prof. Lakdawala received wide professional and public recognition for his manifold intellectual contributions towards nation-building. A commendable facet of Prof. Lakdawala's work lay in the area of institution-building and nurturing; and he was closely associated with the establishment of several national level socio-economic institutions. He also chaired several Committees and Commissions appointed by the Central and State Governments. While looking at national problems from varied perspectives he always had a pragmatic approach and would come up with viable solutions to them without compromising the interest of the common people.

Prof. Lakdawala will always be remembered for his deeply ingrained and unwavering concern for the poor and disadvantaged sections of our society and also for his pro-poor policies which he advanced and tried to implement as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission. He also made significant contributions as the first Chairman of the Institute of Social Sciences. It is befitting that the institutions with which he has been very intimately connected, the Planning Commission and the Institute of Social Sciences, among many others, have together instituted an Annual Memorial Lecture in honour of such a stalwart, who had remained a leading light among the Indian academic and intellectual community. Prof. Joseph Stiglitz, in recognition of Prof. Lakdawala's manifold contributions has appropriately, if I may so, spoken in his honour by reflecting on an issue which is of world-wide importance to the current phase of global economic order, which is witnessing the perils and pitfalls of unregulated economic activities by nation-states.

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* Presidential Address at the Tenth D.T. Lakdawala Memorial Lecture on *Crises Today and the Future of Capitalism*, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi (20 December 2008).

The 1990s have been a period of profound changes in economic realities and policies throughout the world, including India. In one sense, these changes have been more in the direction of endorsing the notion of the ultimate invincibility of the capitalist economic order. A wave of economic liberalization has swept through many Third World countries which had earlier declared themselves as unwavering followers of Socialism. Many of them extended a very enthusiastic reception to foreign capital and created conditions for the full play of the so-called 'market forces' in their domestic economies.

Going by our experiences of the recent past, capitalism has brought profits and prosperity but, at the same time, it has also brought about misery and insecurity to many, both, globally and within nations, rich and poor alike. It has linked up national economies but has fragmented economies within national boundaries. Presently, the world economy has been suffering its most severe recession since the Second World War. The current economic crisis has impacted practically the entire world.

The present crisis of global recession is rightly believed to be the direct outcome of the unregulated financial markets where banking and other financial institutions resorted to unsustainable levels of lending for the sake of short-term gains, which fortunately the public sector banks in India did not indulge in. Speculative tendencies in order to make quick and easy money without any productive initiatives have added to the problem. The collapse of the financial sector has now forced governments in the United States and in many European countries, which were otherwise considered to be the ideal models for the play of full blown capitalism, to devise bail-out plans with huge sums of taxpayers' money.

Such a high level of State intervention, no doubt, is a stark admission of the failure of the ideology of deregulation of markets which has been the corner-stone of a neo-liberal economic doctrine which itself is deeply embedded with the contemporary capitalist ideals. It is also argued that such bailouts are bound to increase taxes on the common people and add to their hardships.

The whole scenario has shaken the foundation of modern capitalism and has compelled the policy makers to come up with newer sets of regulations and procedures to save their collapsing economies. The fact that even the die-hard enthusiasts of capitalist economy begged and pleaded for State intervention, as a life support system, speaks volumes about the gravity of the crisis that the *laissez-faire* capitalism is faced with today highlighting the apparent contradictions in this 'invincible ideology'. This is where socially sensitive economists like Prof. Stiglitz, have very important role to play than those whom he justifiably calls the 'free market fundamentalists'.

To find an effective way out of the current crisis, for people like me, it seems neither too much regulation or total non-regulation, will find the solution but perhaps solutions lies in following Prof. Stiglitz's proposition of the 'third way'. Learning lessons from the mistakes of the past, particularly of recent years, the global community need to devise institutional mechanisms to effectively address the crisis. No single nation, howsoever powerful or omniscient it may perceive itself to be, will be able to address the challenges before the world by its own unilateral actions. This is all the more important in the context of the growing menace of terrorism that many established democracies are confronted today with tremendous economic consequences.

Markets, which are extolled as the lifeline of capitalism relentlessly, favour the strong over the weak. When the markets fail, it is invariably the poor, the unorganized and the ill-informed sections of society who bear the brunt. Under the given circumstances, the State has a prime duty to step in to discharge its responsibility to protect the economically weaker sections and, for that purpose, to frame new rules to prevent, in future, the kind of activities that lead to such crises and to provide stimulus to the economy for its recovery.

It is contended with great force that free-market capitalism, in its present form, has tended to destabilise the global economic system and to corrupt democracy. In any case, we certainly need a better economic system that is sensitive to the need for more inclusive development and thus conditioned to serve the humanity in a more efficient way, to ensure that democracy and the economic system have become mutually complementary and reinforcing. Economic reforms have to be effected with a 'human face' for the benefit of the common man.

Along with economic crisis, we are confronted with serious problems like terrorism, religious fundamentalism, environmental degradation, global warming, growing inequality and poverty, which have to be confronted with to enable the world as a whole to progress and for the people to survive.

Economics must serve the needs of humanity. Financial growth and development are meaningless if they cannot be sustained and their benefits do not reach the vulnerable sections of the society. It is said that crises are inherent in a capitalist system and markets will correct themselves on their own but the world's experience is otherwise. Achieving all round sustainability, is thus, the biggest challenge to global capitalism today.

The growing menace of terrorism, no matter what its source is, is one of the biggest threats to national security and global peace in our times. Today their chief targets are open democratic societies. They seek to exploit the strengths of democracy, such as the freedom of movement, open access to public places, and relatively transparent sources of information in the public

domain to execute their horrific designs. To deal with the menace, we need concerted efforts of the global community. Nations perceived to be aiding or abetting terrorist activities, by design or default, need to be identified and isolated and made to account for their complicity through the collective efforts of the global community.

Prof. Stiglitz is of the view that the kind of globalization taking place in the world is not resulting in the desired benefits for the poor people in developing countries like India, which is clearly our experience. The global community should respond appropriately to his profound perception, which calls upon the political institutions to monitor globalization effectively and democratically. His argument against 'the one size fits all' approach and the advocacy of the 'third way', reminds me of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru under whose leadership and farsightedness, India adopted a mixed economy so that the extremes of both capitalism and socialism could be avoided. I am sure that any long-term solution to the present crises can be found only when we are able to build our economic and political systems on the principle of democracy, development with a human face, sustainability and social justice.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the Chairman, the Director and other office-bearers of the Institute of Social Sciences for providing me an opportunity to be here today and to listen to the learned Professor, Joseph Stiglitz, and also to share my views, which are that of a common citizen, with this distinguished gathering on an issue that has aroused anxiety and concern all across the globe.

Thank you.

CLIMATE CHANGE: A THREAT TO HUMAN EXISTENCE*

I extend a very warm welcome to all of you to this Preliminary Meeting of the Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change.

The issue of Global Warming and Climate Change is one of the most pressing global environmental challenges we are facing today. The successive droughts and floods and the increased frequency of storms, intense heat waves and heavy monsoon in the recent years have demonstrated the immediate consequences of global warming and climate change. Such climatic changes adversely affect biodiversity, ecological systems, coral, wetland and forest systems. The loss of eco-systems and biodiversity would, in turn, affect the quality of human development itself. Addressing such a grave issue requires concerted efforts at different levels, both national and international.

The international community has time and again expressed its serious concern regarding this global problem. The adoption of the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) at the *Rio Earth Summit* in May 1992 and the subsequent adoption of the *Kyoto Protocol* in 1997 were remarkable initiatives in this regard. These initiatives primarily sought to achieve the stabilization of greenhouse gases (GHGs) concentration in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

According to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global warming may have a devastating impact on the climate. The Report also suggests that 'warming of the climate system is unequivocal', and most of the global average warming over the past 50 years is very likely due to anthropogenic greenhouse gases increases. The impact of climate change will be particularly severe on the developing countries that lack the capacity to limit its deleterious effects. Several studies have stressed that climate change will affect millions of people in India in different ways, putting enormous pressure on our efforts to achieve a higher growth rate. It is, therefore, imperative that we take appropriate steps and synergise our efforts, policies and programmes to make development sustainable.

* Inaugural Address at the Preliminary Meeting of the Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change, New Delhi (22 December 2008).

Friends, India, with 17 per cent of the world's population, contributes only 4 per cent of the total global greenhouse gas emissions. In terms of per capita GHG emissions, it is about 23 per cent of the global average. India has probably the most comprehensive framework of legal and institutional mechanisms to respond to the tremendous challenges to the environment. India is also probably the first developing country which has incorporated into its Constitution the specific provisions for environmental protection. No doubt, it would be ideal if we are able to create conditions whereby we do not do anything that would compromise environmental concerns.

As you all know, India is a Party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We deposited our instrument of accession to the *Kyoto Protocol* in 2002 and established the National Clean Development Mechanism Authority in December 2003. We are also a partner to the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate which consists of Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and the U.S.A. We adopted the National Environment Policy in 2006 and have taken many other measures and policy initiatives. The Government also set up an 'Expert Committee on Impacts of Climate Change' in May 2007 to study the effect of anthropogenic climate change and to identify measures that we may have to take in future to address these impacts. Further, in June 2007, a Council was set up under the Chairmanship of the Hon'ble Prime Minister comprising eminent persons to evolve a coordinated response to issues relating to climate change at the national level and provide oversight for formulation of action plans in the area of assessment.

On the international plane, India has been pressing at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and other Conferences for collaborative development of clean technologies and immediate transfer of existing environment friendly technologies to the developing countries. It has been India's stand not to agree to any commitments related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In order to meet the demands of rising standards of living and providing access to commercial energy to those lacking it, the total emission of green house gases is bound to increase in India and also in other developing countries. India, however, is committed to a position that our per-capita GHGs emission level will never be higher than that of the developed countries. These countries, being responsible for the problem, owing to their historical as well as current emissions, need to take measures to stabilize and reduce their emissions of GHGs.

India firmly believes that the issue of climate change and global warming is not country-specific but is inter-dependent in nature and requires cooperation among nations at the international, regional and bilateral level. With effective cooperation, large and small countries can share early warning

systems of any environmental calamity. Needless to say, environmental cooperation creates an effective path to peace by promoting sustainable resource use and equity within and between countries. As the Chairman of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, Dr. R.K. Pachauri has stressed time and again, 'the challenge before us is not only a large one, it is also one in which every year of delay implies a commitment to greater climate change in the future'. Saving our Earth is our shared responsibility, a commitment we must meet for the safety and well being of future generations.

As parliamentarians, we can play a very crucial role towards environment protection. We are in an advantageous position to sensitise decision makers, policy planners and those responsible for the implementation of various programmes. As educators, parliamentarians can make people aware of the gravity of the problem and mobilize public opinion. It is with this in view that I took the initiative to constitute the Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change. As you know, we already have a Parliamentary Forum on Water Conservation and Management. These Forums could enable experts and specialists to interact with parliamentarians so that the elected representatives will be better equipped to address these crucial issues in the Chambers of Parliament and in the Committees. I am sure the Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change will take up important issues in related areas for discussion in its meetings.

Thank you.

EMPOWERMENT OF THE VISUALLY CHALLENGED*

I am happy to be associated with the celebrations marking the birth Bi-centenary of Louis Braille and to give away the newly-instituted National Award for the Best Braille Press instituted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. I am indeed glad to know that this Award is being given for the first time in the category of the Best Braille Press and I heartily compliment the Hon'ble Minister, Smt. Meira Kumar, for this laudable initiative, which, I am sure will go a long way in encouraging those entrusted with the running of Braille Presses to further their contributions in educating and empowering our visually impaired people.

As you all know, Louis Braille made it possible for millions of visually-impaired people across the world to learn reading and writing through a unique system. This gifted inventor, who had lost his eyesight at an early age, heralded a new chapter in the lives of the visually challenged people by enabling them to have access to knowledge and information that hold the key to their empowerment. Louis Braille's ingenious method of writing the words, music and plainchant with dots and their arrangement for the use of the visually impaired came out in 1829. In fact, the invention of Braille enabled access to education and paved the way for the integration of the visually-challenged people socially, culturally and economically with the rest of society. Louis Braille firmly believed that education was the most potent instrument of empowering the visually impaired, and in his prophetic words: 'access to communication in the widest sense is access to knowledge, and that is vitally important for us if we are not to go on being despised or patronized by condescending sighted people. We do not need pity, nor do we need to be reminded that we are vulnerable. We must be treated as equals — and communication is the way we can bring this about.'

In a democratic world, with greater emphasis on equal rights and opportunities for each and every member of society, literacy has a pioneering role, and in this pursuit, the unique method of promoting literacy among the visually challenged people, devised by Louis Braille, remains unparalleled. Braille has, no doubt, undergone technological and scientific transformation since its creation, but its underlying spirit of creating an enabling environment

* At the function marking the birth bi-centenary of Louis Braille, New Delhi (4 January 2009).

for the visually impaired people to overcome their physical infirmities has helped establish their greater integration in society.

Louis Braille's spectacular contribution to the enrichment of human life, the lives of the visually challenged in particular, and his unrelenting spirit to make life worthwhile for those who cannot see the physical world around need to be acclaimed by one and all. In the words of Helen Keller, 'It's high time for Louis Braille's genius to be recognized and for the story to be told...he built a large, firm stairway for millions of sense-crippled human beings to climb.' It is in this context that the birth Bi-centenary Celebrations of Louis Braille becomes all the more important. I hope this event will provide the right opportunity to recall the inspiring life and profound works of Louis Braille who was singularly instrumental in enabling the visually impaired people to gain access to knowledge and wisdom, as also in enabling them to perform their varied activities in today's world with greater ease.

As you may be aware, India is home to the world's largest number of visually challenged people. It is reported that out of the 37 million visually impaired people across the world, more than 15 million are from India. India has a large percentage of children who are visually challenged and it is reported that a significant number of our visually impaired population are of school age. It is also a fact that a majority of them live in rural areas where the lack of required facilities and the unsympathetic attitude of the people reflect in denial to them of their legitimate rights to receive education. The nation and the society should provide the right enabling environment for the development of those of our citizens who are visually challenged. Their Right to Education, demands creating all facilities for them. Enabling vocational training, facilitating placement, producing reading material, developing library collections, extending access to visual aids, etc. should be provided for expeditiously.

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment should be complimented for undertaking various measures for the development and welfare of such population. The Ministry's National Programme for Control of Blindness, now implemented throughout the country, has tremendously benefited the affected people. The National Institute for the Visually Handicapped has been undertaking various programmes such as vocational training, manpower development, research and development, crisis management, including therapeutic assistance, placement and employment, production of reading material, manufacturing of aids and appliances, library and information service and education for the visually handicapped. The Model School for the Visually Handicapped set up by the Institute is rendering an exemplary service in providing education to the vision-affected people, partially sighted and low-vision children from Nursery to Class 10.

I understand that the School provides hassle-free education to the fully impaired through Braille and tactile sensation method and to the partially-sighted and low-vision children through the use of magnifying devices for reading the printed text. The Institute's Braille Press is producing reading material in Braille for the use of visually handicapped readers. I am told that the Institute is also making use of various latest Braille appliances for facilitating the education of the visually impaired. However, the number of Braille books produced by our Braille Presses are reportedly not sufficient to cater to the needs of the visually challenged readers, which has to be looked into by all concerned in this field with sincerity and seriousness.

Notwithstanding the various measures and schemes undertaken by the Government, what is required is that all stakeholders of society should come forward not only in empowering the affected but also in bringing a change in the perception of our society to them and their problems. It is also the responsibility of the Government to ensure a hurdle-free environment for the visually disabled persons in matters of education, employment, access and travel facilities. After all, the progress and prosperity of each section of society is intertwined with our overall national progress.

I hope this function to celebrate the Birth Bi-centenary of Louis Braille will provide an opportunity to look into the varied problems confronting our visually disabled people as also the role of the Braille Presses in educating this segment of our society, especially through technological upgradation and adoption and integration of the latest developments in the field. I am sure this will also provide a platform for interaction among the Braille Press, the Ministry and all those concerned with the education and welfare of our visually challenged population. In fact, the institution of the National Award for the Best Braille Press is a befitting tribute to the commitment of the legendary Louis Braille for the cause of the visually impaired in his birth Bi-centenary Year.

Before I conclude, I would like to congratulate the winners of the Award for the best Braille Press and compliment Smt. Meira Kumar for this creditable endeavour. I also pay my homage to Louis Braille and his unwavering commitment to the cause of the visually impaired.

Thank you.

It is a matter of pleasure and an honour for me to be here and to have the opportunity to associate myself with this function, organised as part of the Fourth International Polar Year Programmes. I compliment the CSIR for its initiatives in organizing an event of this nature, reminding the country of the importance of preserving the eco-system of the polar region. It is important that the people should be made aware that the changes beginning to be observed in the Polar regions today will not remain confined to those regions alone. They will have their adverse effects on the whole eco-system and necessarily on human life and society.

No doubt, the programmes associated with the International Polar Year, with the participation of thousands of Scientists and environmentalists from across the globe, will help the world community in better understanding the issues concerning our environment, and in particular of the implications of the changes being observed in the polar region.

I am happy that the CSIR and the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India, have been collaborating with international scientific institutions to forge closer scientific links on this issue of grave concern to the world community today. In fact, this Ministry and the CSIR are fortunate to have a Minister, who has had first hand experience of the real situation in both Antarctica and the Arctic by his visits there and direct interaction with the scientists working in this crucial area. I wish to compliment him for all the initiatives he has taken. It is indeed a matter of great pride that India now has permanent stations at both the locations, where competent scientific research is being carried out, from which our country and the world can benefit immensely.

Both the CSIR and the Ministry of Earth Sciences should be acclaimed for having initiated several new scientific projects and also launched campaigns to spread awareness about the seriousness of the problem not only among the scientific community but the general public as well. There is indeed an urgent need to understand the vulnerability of the Polar Regions of the Earth, which have a profound influence on the global environment, particularly on the weather and climate systems.

* At the function organized by the CSIR to mark the International Polar Year, New Delhi (4 February 2009).

The ice and snow in the Polar Regions reflect most of the incoming solar energy back to space, thus helping to maintain the Earth's temperature. Polar ice also affects the ocean currents, which in turn have a profound influence on the world's climate and weather patterns.

We can foresee with more clarity today the problems that will be faced by the present and coming generations if we do not deal with the most disturbing phenomena of global warming and climate change by adopting appropriate measures. The issue of Global Warming and Climate Change is one of the most pressing global environmental challenges we are facing today. The successive droughts and floods and the increased frequency of storms, intense heat waves and heavy monsoon in the recent years are only the visible and immediate consequences of global warming. Such climatic changes adversely affect biodiversity, ecological systems, coral, wetland and forest systems. The loss of eco-systems and bio-diversity would, in turn, affect the quality of human development itself. Addressing such a grave issue requires concerted efforts at different levels, both national and international.

Seasonal and terrestrial eco-system changes have resulted in inequitable water distribution and affected rainfall patterns, hampering agricultural productivity. The impact of climate change will be particularly severe on the developing countries that lack the capacity to limit its deleterious effects.

The Polar Regions are especially vulnerable to the phenomenon of global warming. As more greenhouse gases cause our planet to warm, some of the ice and snow in the Polar Regions melts, resulting in reduced reflection of solar rays out into space and of it's absorption by the Earth's surface and oceans. The added energy further warms the Polar Regions, causing more ice to melt and accentuating the warming process. Industrial soot is also affecting the rates of melting of polar ice. Indeed, the signs are today clearly visible with widespread shrinking of snow base and ice in the Polar Regions. This vicious cycle will ultimately lead to rising sea levels and flooding of vast tracts of the Earth potentially making large areas uninhabitable.

The effects of climate change are not the same in all parts of the world. While Earth's average temperature has risen 0.6 Degree Celsius during the 20th century, the Polar Regions of our planet are warming faster than others. The Arctic, for example, is warming twice as fast as other parts of the world. According to NASA-processed satellite microwave data, this perennial ice used to cover 50-60 per cent of the Arctic but this winter it covered less than 30 per cent. In fact, in 2007 and 2008 the ice melted to an all-time low, causing worries that it could eventually melt away completely. Scientists believe that sea ice in the Arctic Ocean is melting so quickly that by the year 2040 there may not be any sea ice in the Arctic during summer months. The Antarctic peninsula has also warmed rapidly, five times faster than the global average.

One of the most visible and tragic effects has been on the Polar bears that are fast dwindling in numbers due to the shrinking ice cover, their primary habitat. Polar bears use sea ice platforms for hunting seals, and are forced to swim longer distances when the ice melts, making them more likely to tire and drown.

Apart from the regional and global implications for eco-systems and weather patterns, changes in the Arctic environment also have profound influence on more than 4 million people who have made the Arctic their home and the communities to which they belong face changes in their natural environment and in their natural resources and food systems.

Ultimately the changes in the Polar Regions affect us all, and if allowed to degrade any further, will have their impacts significantly on global weather patterns and sea level. It is only a question of time before the wider consequences become apparent and unmanageable.

The Parliament and the Government will have to continue to make every possible endeavour to promote economic development without compromising on the health of the eco-system. Environmental considerations are increasingly being integrated into the planning, designing and implementation of our developmental programmes today. Our Parliament, as the highest deliberative and legislative body, has been giving serious attention to this problem and only last year the Lok Sabha had about four-and-a-half-hour long debate on global warming. Our Parliament's Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Science and Technology and Environment and Forests has been constantly evaluating the functioning of the Ministries concerned. The Speaker's Office has also taken several initiatives to make our elected representatives more aware of the imperative of ecological conservation and sustainable development and has constituted a Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change and another one on Water Conservation and Management, besides the Forum on Youth, Forum on Children and the Forum on Population and Public Health with a view to equipping the Members of Parliament with adequate information and knowledge about issues and developments in these vital areas. The Lectures by global environmental activists like the former US Vice-President and Nobel Laureate Mr. Al Gore, Dr. R.K. Pachauri and Dr. Sunita Narayan, among others, that we had organized last year, were indeed, eye-openers to the gravity of the challenges that the world community is facing on the environmental front today. These measures have, no doubt, gone a long way in sensitizing the members of Parliament on the issues relating to environment and the importance of adopting policies for sustainable development.

The International Polar Year, therefore, is an opportunity for the world community of scientists to get together with all their intelligence and instruments and tools at their command to take the necessary initiative for reversing the present trends. Science today knows no boundaries, whether of disciplines or countries or regions. And global problems and issues can only be tackled through collaboration on a global scale. Today, therefore, there is a need to closely monitor the changes taking place in the Polar Regions so that remedial action may be initiated without any further delay.

We have to maintain a balance between growth and developmental activities and our ecology. This calls for adopting a path that promotes development without hindering the delicate ecological balance. The necessity of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs should guide us in our developmental activities.

I also take this opportunity to felicitate our scientists who are making committed endeavours to understand the threats to the eco-system of the Polar Regions.

Thank you.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT: ROLE OF LOCAL BODIES*

I am indeed grateful to the Hon'ble Speaker, Shri K.R. Suresh Reddy, for inviting me here and giving me this opportunity to associate myself with today's function. Just before coming here, I have had the honour of unveiling the statue of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at the Sriram Sagar Project at Pochampad. The foundation stone of the Project, as you all know, was laid by none other than Panditji himself. For Pandit Nehru, dams like the Sriram Sagar Project were the 'temples of modern India' as they were seen as ennobling ventures being integral to the development of the region and the nation as a whole. Pandit Nehru was indeed the pioneering institution-builder of modern India, and we salute his noble vision for the development of the country.

I also take this opportunity to compliment Shri Suresh Reddy, with whom my association has been very close for the last several years, for his great qualities as a Speaker and also as an effective representative of the people. I have received considerable help from him on many occasions and in recognition of his contribution, I was very happy to nominate him as a Member of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for three years. As a representative of our Parliamentary institution, at my request and on behalf of the Speaker, Lok Sabha, Shri Reddy visited several Commonwealth countries to represent India's stand at the international fora on diverse issues. I must acknowledge that he discharged those responsibilities with great commitment and remarkable success. I use this occasion to pay my sincere compliments to him for all his help and support to me and for representing the country in a very dignified manner, whenever his services were required in the cause of our parliamentary democracy and our country. I am sure that the political life of the great State of Andhra Pradesh and India as a whole will continue to be enriched by the participation of devoted worker and Leader like Shri Suresh Reddy.

I greatly appreciate the initiative taken by Shri Reddy for undertaking the Comprehensive Protected Water Supply Scheme for providing safe and hygienic drinking water to a large number of villages in the Balkonda and Nizamabad districts of Andhra Pradesh. As I have learnt, most of the villages,

* At the Seminar on *Rural Development and the Role of Local Bodies*, Andhra Pradesh (14 February 2009).

covered by this Scheme, are in remote areas, which will now have access to safe drinking water. In view of the importance and need of availability of drinking water, Shri Reddy's vision for micro-planning of drinking water facilities in rural areas is extremely laudable. I congratulate Shri Reddy for his zeal and passion and initiative to introduce and implement such an extremely important project for the welfare of his constituents.

Friends, to ensure and promote 'people-centred governance for grassroots democratization process,' it is essential that we take the institutions of governance nearer to the people and the common and well-meaning people should be encouraged to participate in the same actively and at different levels of representative bodies and the administrative machinery. The *Panchayati Raj* system, which we have introduced in the country is a noble endeavour in that direction.

Gandhiji's dream of democracy based on villages upwards is reflected in our Constitution which directs the States to organize village *Panchayats* with adequate powers and authority and to function as units of self-government. Our Constitution has provided for grassroots democracy and decentralization of power and authority which make India not only the world's largest democracy but also the most participatory and representative one. *Panchayats* are the institutions of rural self-governance in planning and implementation of development programmes. We are proud that we have now more than 30 lakh elected representatives at the three levels of *Panchayats*. Of these, over 10 lakhs are women and more than 5 lakhs belong to the socially marginalized sections of our country, who are making great contribution for the empowerment of the common people.

For the administration of the system, the emphasis should be on planning from below with participation at the grassroots level. It is the responsibility of the *Gram Sabhas*, the Village *Panchayats*, the Block *Panchayats* and the District *Panchayats* to decide about the developmental works to be carried out in their respective areas.

A large number of women, the underprivileged and socially and economically backward people are now occupying positions of power and responsibility due to reservation provided to them in the *Panchayats*. Slowly and steadily, the women representatives have become the spokespersons for the local community. The empowerment of rural women through the *Panchayats* is the first step towards their political awakening and will undoubtedly contribute to the emergence of a new, broad-based political leadership in the country in the long run.

In view of the significance and importance of the *Panchayati Raj* Institution, various studies have been conducted by some agencies about the working of the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions, including by our Parliamentary Committees. These studies emphasize that what is urgently needed is to ensure that our *Panchayats* are provided with finance, functions and functionaries, so as to realize Gandhiji's vision of prosperous village republics.

The *Panchayati* Institutions now have a very significant role to play in the effective implementation of many of the pioneering projects for public welfare, like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Bharat Nirman, National Health Programmes and several other extremely beneficial and pro-people programmes launched by the Central Government in recent years. The *Panchayats* are also given responsibility to implement the Rural Electrification Programme and the Total Sanitation Campaign. They are also playing an important role in the management of local schools under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan. The meaningful implementation of such schemes with the involvement of the local bodies, will not only give a new dimension to the concept of *'swaraj'* but to the notion of good governance itself. Ultimately, it should be the endeavour of everyone at all levels of governance to ensure that the intended benefits of these well-meaning programmes reach the common people for whom they are devised.

I appeal to all those who are associated with the *Panchayat* organisations to honestly and sincerely implement the projects and schemes so that entire resources which are meant for their benefit reach them and are not wasted or diverted for other purposes. Unfortunately, there are complaints from various States about the misuse of the resources, which is a matter of great concern. It is our bounden duty to see that every *paisa* ear-marked for our people in the rural areas is fully utilized for their benefit and for nothing else. In this respect, I appeal to the Members of Parliament and Legislative Assemblies to render their valuable assistance by monitoring and supervising the due implementation of the different schemes without, of course, interfering in any manner.

The *Panchayati Raj* Institutions have raised very high expectations in the minds of the rural people about their steady and comprehensive development. It is the responsibility of the Governments and the civil society to facilitate and support the leadership of the *Panchayats* by providing facilities to them for suitable training and orientation programmes and by delegating to them necessary powers and by providing sufficient resources.

Andhra Pradesh has been one of the first two States in India to establish a three-tier *Panchayati Raj* Institutions as early as in 1959. The 23,000 *Panchayats* in the State with nearly a quarter million elected representatives, including about 74,000 women representatives, truly reflect the real democratic

representation and devolution of power at the grassroot level in the State today. The standing committee system it has in the *Panchayats*, focusing on seven most crucial areas of concern to the people, is an effective mechanism to ensure a close scrutiny of the allocation and for monitoring developmental works, and thereby for ensuring greater transparency and accountability in the system.

The *Panchayats* in Andhra Pradesh have helped in bringing the administration to the doorsteps of the rural Andhra. I am happy to learn that the State Government has instituted 'Shubhram' Awards for the cleanest *Gram Panchayats* from 22 districts to motivate and inspire the *Panchayats*. I am sure, these Awards will be another step forward in ensuring total sanitation and supply of safe drinking water in the *Panchayats*.

With greater role in the future development of rural India, it is imperative that these institutions are given the political authority and financial resources to discharge their functions effectively. In these endeavours, the members of the State Legislative Assemblies and the Parliament should render all help to the *Panchayat* bodies.

The *Panchayats* are the building blocks to development and prosperity of our people. Today, the global economy, is going through a period of crisis. We may not be able to insulate ourselves totally from its effects. It is, however, imperative for us to ensure that the interests of our rural masses are protected with the utmost sincerity. Through pro-active governmental intervention, we have been able to make a beginning in reversing the adverse effects of globalisation on rural India. We have to do a lot more to sustain that momentum. Our *Panchayats* should take it as a challenge to insulate the rural masses from the adverse effects of the recessionary tendencies visible today. I am sure you will not fail your people. The success of our democracy and the progress of the nation itself depends on how, together, we strengthen our governance structures. The enlightened people's representatives of Andhra, I am sure, are fully conscious of the same.

I once again thank Shri K.R. Suresh Reddy for extending this invitation to me, giving me the opportunity to dedicate the Comprehensive Protected Water Supply Scheme to the people of Andhra Pradesh.

I wish all of you all success and steady all-round progress in the coming days.

Thank you.

EDUCATION: A GREAT LEVELER*

It is indeed an honour and a special privilege to be invited to deliver the Convocation Address at this University, named after one of the greatest Buddhist teachers, Acharya Nagarjuna, here today. I am grateful to the respected Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, the Faculty and the Administration of the University for giving me this opportunity to be here and to address the members of one of the reputed centers of learning in our country, located in this beautiful region.

All through its over three decades of existence, this University has been making remarkable contributions in moulding the young minds of this region, into socially responsible and productive human resources serving the needs of the State of Andhra Pradesh and the country as such.

Today this University which has kept pace with the fast emerging educational and occupational trends around the world is the centre of intellectual and scholarly pursuits of the people of this important region of Andhra Pradesh, successfully realizing the various expectations placed on it at the time of its foundation in 1976. Its expansion, from 10 post-graduate programmes of study offered in 1976 to 53 today, besides introduction of general professional courses relevant to our times, is indeed phenomenal. Its focus on job-oriented and vocational programmes, has helped thousands of young people to find gainful employment. The distinguished Vice-Chancellor and his dedicated team of teachers, staff and students can legitimately be proud of their accomplishments, through their committed and diligent efforts. Quantitative expansion and qualitative improvements on various academic fronts have been made possible through the efforts of its dedicated Faculty, an efficient team of supporting staff and high quality students input.

The University has encouraged several colleges within its jurisdiction to introduce job-oriented and add-on courses at the Undergraduate and Post-graduate levels. Academic autonomy has so far been extended to ten of the affiliated colleges as per the direction of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi. The University has ensured that, while there is a need for quantitative growth to cater to the increasing demand for higher education

* At the Annual Convocation of the Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar, Andhra Pradesh (14 March, 2009).

from the community at large, the quality of education offered at various levels is maintained, at a high level.

I feel humbled by your decision to confer your prestigious honorary degree on me. Coming as it is from a community of learned people, I take it as a great honour for me. I am grateful to his Excellency, the Chancellor and the entire University Community, for their kind recognition of my humble service.

At the outset, I would like to offer my hearty congratulations to all those who have successfully completed their programmes of study and are going to receive their honours and degrees today. I extend my best wishes to all of them with the firm belief that having received a high level of education of this University they will now make positive impact on the world around them by contributing in different ways, which will, no doubt, help in the comprehensive development of our country in the years to come.

Friends, the importance of education in a democracy is self-evident. Democracy underpins the dignity of the individual and is based on the assumption of the infinite value and worth of the human personality, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, race, gender or religion. It is higher learning that equips us with the mindset and the attitude to see humanity beyond narrow confine and as part of a larger family. The institutions of higher learning occupy a key position in the development strategy of a nation. We can build a strong and progressive nation only with a good University system. It is through them that we can create the kind of intellectual and professional environment necessary to move forward for a developing country like ours.

In the wake of freedom, our developmental planners had identified universal elementary education as one of the priority areas requiring national attention. They had recognized that only through good education we can produce trained manpower to provide momentum to economic progress, to provide better quality of life to our people, to help bring about an acceptable level of social and economic equity in the country and to promote the task of our national integration. Accordingly, the right to 'free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen' was listed, in the Chapter on the Directive Principles of State Policy of our Constitution, as a goal to be achieved.

The various policies for educational development announced from time to time had envisaged the improvement and expansion of education in all sectors, elimination of disparities and on the improvement of the quality of education. No doubt, we have made substantial progress in the field of education over the years. Starting with 28 Universities and 695 Colleges for nearly 400 million people in 1950-51, we have made substantial progress through these years, with the number of Universities and deemed Universities

reaching over 300 with over 9000 colleges under them for over a billion people today. We are, however, still far behind the target of achieving universal education. When we consider the fact that only less than 10 per cent of the University education age-group, between 18 and 23, are actually taking the benefit of higher education, as compared to 47 per cent in the developed countries, we get to realize the task yet to be performed.

Education is seen as a great leveler in society. It is also the most important tool for empowerment of the people, particularly the socially and economically weaker sections. Our educational system, however, has not been able to offer a level-playing field to the cross-section of our people. There is a wide gap between the opportunities available to the rich, educated and urban-centered people and the poor illiterate or semi-literate, rural and other disadvantageously placed. Socio-economic development is bypassing a significant segment of our population today as they do not have access to a quality education relevant to their requirements. Only through universalisation of education, laying special stress on vocational education and on the education of the girl child can we bring about qualitative improvement in the lives of our people.

We have to take our whole society along on the path of education and development and should not allow any section to lag behind. Of special importance is the education facilities for women who constitute nearly fifty per cent of our population. There is an unacceptably wide disparity between the literacy levels of men and women in our country. Only through education can we equip the women also to make their own contributions to the productive processes in the society. Lack of equal opportunity for education prevents adequate empowerment of women.

Transforming our huge human resources into an asset is one of the greatest developmental challenges we have before us today. India has enormous unexploited potential as a 'knowledge hub' for the world. In fact, the rest of the world recognizes this distinct advantage that we have. Our basic mathematical abilities, our proficiency in the English language, our tested competence in the IT sector, among others, if properly exploited, can give a great momentum to our economic development. For this, the most important prerequisite is due emphasis on quality education. The impact that the Indian professionals are making in several parts of the world today, as world class professionals, should inspire our youth to perform better and through them to transform our country too. One of the important factors that is helping us in insulating ourselves from the grave economic crisis affecting the world today is our self-reliance on quality man-power.

Though the initial years after our Independence were marked by considerable struggles and difficulties, we have emerged stronger from those trials and tribulations today. At the end of six decades of freedom, we have remarkable achievements to our credit. Through a parliamentary polity, a multi-party system, free and fair elections, independent Judiciary, free and vigilant Fourth Estate and an ever watchful citizenry, we have made great strides in consolidating our democracy. We can take pride in maintaining overall national unity in spite of stresses and strains and for laying the institutional foundations of our Republic.

Through the effective intervention of our Parliament, we have put in place several progressive legislations to deal with the different issues and challenges before the nation. A number of progressive legislations have been enacted to usher in the desired social change, and, amongst others, for promoting the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of society.

The literacy level in our country still remains abysmally low. It is disheartening that nearly a third of our population lacks literacy skills and about 53 per cent children drop out from schooling at the elementary stage itself. None of the civil, political, economic and social rights can be exercised by individuals unless they have received a certain minimum education. Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen has rightly observed:

> "When people are illiterate, their ability to understand and invoke their legal rights can be very limited, and educational neglect can also lead to other kinds of deprivation. Indeed, this tends to be a persistent problem for people at the bottom of the ladder, whose rights are often effectively alienated because of their inability to read and see what they are entitled to demand and how. The educational gap clearly has a class connection...If we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure".

Friends, if we look at the India of today, into the seventh decade of freedom, we can discern that our people are virtually living in different centuries. On the one hand, we have islands of affluence and on the other, the majority who are still struggling with penury and privation. The socially backward sections are even today outside the pale of full empowerment. Our villages where the real India lives continue to remain largely untouched by the socio-economic advances that we have made. Poverty, backwardness, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of healthcare and basic infrastructure are among the many ills that continue to afflict our population, especially in the rural areas.

Although the poverty ratio has declined in recent years, being a highly populous country, the number of people below poverty line still remains high, with wide variations across States, which weakens our democratic edifice which we have built up through long years of struggles, trials and uncertainties. If our democracy has to emerge meaningfully into a system of governance which brings about a qualitative improvement in the lives of our people, we need to urgently address the developmental challenges before the nation.

The rising expectations of the people, if not adequately fulfilled, can undermine our democratic system as a whole. It is imperative that we pool in all our human resources and our collective strength towards nation building and not allow it go waste in the name of emotive and divisive issues. We have to create a culture of commitment to democracy and democratic values such as equality, justice, freedom, secularism and respect for human dignity and rights. Education devoid of these values is bound to give rise to destabilising and divisive tendencies in society, which will be deleterious to the health of our democracy.

Issues like intolerance, divisiveness, religious fundamentalism, corruption, confrontation and disrespect for dissent are increasingly vitiating our socio-political system. The growing disenchantment of the people, particularly of our youth with our political system and democracy, should be a matter of concern for all of us.

My young friends who are receiving their degrees today and others who have the opportunity for higher education should bear in mind that the elements that corrupt and corrode our political system and vitiate the national fabric are as much the products of our educational system and does not function in isolation from the society of which it is an integral part. Our educated people, should not choose to keep themselves away from taking part in public affairs. People who have had the benefit of receiving higher education, which the community provides, should get involved into the system, as a duty to the nation. It is, thus extremely necessary that our educated citizenry took the responsibility and joined our political life so that they can take on the challenge of changing the system from within more effectively and meaningfully. Democracy is not all about forms alone. Modern democracy is fundamentally about its substance, about what it delivers for the people.

Another priority area which we should address is mainstreaming development and institution building and comprehensive empowerment of all sections of our people so as to make our democracy more inclusive and participatory. It has to be realized that each one of us, irrespective of gender

and age, have to equally participate in the task of nation-building. A major step in this direction was taken with the passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to our Constitution. These Amendments have strengthened the local level institutions. By decentralizing power and taking participative democracy to the *panchayat* level, these institutions have provided the people with a new and a more accessible platform to raise their voice and have a direct role in the developmental process. The reservation for women in these institutions has resulted in more than a million women *sarpanches*, beginning to pay a very pro-active and meaningful role in the development of the areas of which they are an integral part. This is having a remarkable impact on the overall development of rural India.

Friends, poverty, illiteracy, development of infrastructure, amongst other problems facing us, are tangible problems that can be seen, assessed and worked on but there are areas which have more to do with our attitudes, values, influences and character that also need to be given due attention. Problem areas like corruption, confrontation, divisiveness, communalism, regionalism, and intolerance continue to affect various aspects of our lives. Understandably, the functioning of our political institutions is under intense pressure and there is considerable cynicism among the citizenry about this. In this context, criminalization of politics is one area which requires more focused attention. We have witnessed a steady decline in values in all sections of our society and in all walks of our national life.

My young friends, the developmental challenges and socio-political problems facing the country are immense. It would be essential to evolve a national consensus on vital issues of national interest so that the concerted efforts of political parties, the academia, the educated and conscientious citizens and the system as a whole are used to build the India of our dreams. All of you are at the threshold of plunging into one or other responsible job or for further studies. The choices you make and your responses to the challenges and crises before the country will have their distinct impact on our country's future.

As you all will agree, Parliament remains the most pivotal institution in our democratic set-up for translating the people's expectations into reality. To make it effective, a large number of committed and well-meaning people need to take their place in politics. The educated youth are the future of India and they will have to play a more active role in politics if they want our country to develop and take its rightful position among the comity of nations. Being a critical spectator is not going to solve the problems of the nation. You must realize and accept the responsibility to free the people of the injustices in society, to raise the quality of life of the weaker sections, to reinvigorate the democratic values in our country, to put an end to intolerance and divisive

trends in our polity, and to eliminate corrupt practices that are spreading as slow poison in our society. As educated youth, you are looked upon as the harbingers of the new era of democratic values and the torchbearers of a developed nation. The time has come when you must offer your services to the nation.

My young friends, as those who have been privileged to receive higher education in one of the prestigious institutions of this country, you must always keep in mind the urges and aspirations, and the demands and dreams of our common people. We need young people with strong democratic commitment and determination to come together and strive for the development of the country.

Before I conclude, I once again congratulate all those who have successfully completed their courses of study and are receiving their degrees at this Convocation. You all know that learning is a lifelong process, which does not end with the acquisition of any degree. As you step out of the sheltered portals of your institution, you will find a wholly new and exciting world of opportunities and learning. I am sure that you will strive to realize not only your own dreams and aspirations in the years to come, but will also help many others to realize their dreams as well. I hope, you will make productive use of the quality education you have received here for the furtherance of our democratic ideals, for the larger national causes, and to help realize the unfinished agenda before the nation.

Once again, I wish to convey my sincere gratitude to the respected Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor and the rest of the University community for giving me this opportunity of being with you. I trust the Acharya Nagarjuna University will continue to produce committed, responsible, disciplined, and socially sensitive students who will be invaluable assets of our country.

Thank you.

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN ESTABLISHING A JUST SOCIETY*

It gives me great pleasure to be here amidst you at the serene and intellectually pulsating campus of the Pondicherry University on the auspicious occasion of your Annual Convocation Function. This historic city, which has experienced a true confluence of the cultures of the East and the West and immortalized by the life and work of our patriotic Saint Rishi Aurobindo and the venerated Mother, has inspired great intellectual creativity among many people. Their collective contributions towards the awakening of national consciousness among the people of this region and in several ways, across the country, were indeed remarkable. This land can also be legitimately proud of its great sons like Subramanya Bharathiar and his distinguished disciple Bharathidasan who, together, contributed immensely towards developing positive social consciousness among the people and for the empowerment of women. It is, therefore, only appropriate that this beautiful and culturally vibrant land is today home to one of the highly enlightened centres of learning being the seat of this great University.

Friends, in another year, you will be celebrating your Silver Jubilee. Over its nearly a quarter century of existence, this University has made commendable progress. With its large number of teaching and research programmes, I understand, only six short of a hundred, under the 31 different Departments, and the five-fold increase in the number of institutions affiliated to it in the last nearly two-decades period, promoting intake of women into the different programmes of study, its unique community college programme, among others, are areas about which the Pondicherry University can be legitimately proud of. I congratulate the distinguished Vice-Chancellor, and his dedicated team of teachers, staff and students for their commendable achievements.

I am happy to learn that the University of Pondicherry has taken several innovative initiatives to reach out to all the areas of its territorial jurisdiction, the mainland, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam, which is one of the unique aspects of the Union territory of Pondicherry. It is indeed an achievement that your distant education department is reaching out to the far off Andaman Islands

* At the Annual Convocation of the Pondicherry University, Puducherry (20 March 2009).

too to cater to their educational needs. I am indeed happy to note that this young Central University, has earned a distinctive place among the reputed centres of learning in our country, successfully realizing the high expectations placed on it at the time of its foundation in 1985. I compliment the University community for it.

I feel humbled by your decision to confer your prestigious honorary degree on me. Coming as it is from a community of learned people, I take it as a great honour for me. I am grateful to his Excellency, the Chancellor, the distinguished Vice-Chancellor and the entire University community for their kind recognition of my humble service.

Before I proceed further, I would like to offer my hearty congratulations to all those who have successfully completed their programmes of study and are receiving their honours and degrees today. I extend my best wishes to all of them with the firm belief that having received a high level of education in this University, they will now make positive impact on the world around them in different ways apart from building their own future career.

Friends, Convocation is an occasion when we should take stock of what has been achieved and what still remains to be done. When you leave the precincts of the University from the certainty of the campus life, you enter a world of uncertainties and challenges. It is an occasion for deep contemplation for the University as well as its products; for the University a test of how best it has trained the students moulding them into socially spirited citizens with a perspective about their life choices; and for the students, a test of how best they are equipped to meet the expectations of the society and the nation and also face the challenges of life as privileged citizens having access to higher education, a privilege restricted to just about 10 per cent of the university-eligible age-group.

As Swami Vivekananda said: "Education is not the amount of information accumulated in the mind which runs riot undigested all through our lives. Education is a process of life-building, man-making and character-forming assimilation of ideas".

The clarity of concept, lucidity of meaning and the depth of idea on education as enunciated by Swami Vivekananda is such that it would be relevant for all times to come. Sri Aurobindo who made Pondicherry a place of international fame said in a similar vein on education:

> The acquiring of various kinds of information is only an end and not the chief of the means and necessities of education. Its central aim is building of the powers of the human mind and spirit. It is the formation of knowledge, character and culture... . Education to be

> complete must have five principal aspects relating to the five principal activities of the human being; the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual.

For such an all inclusive and integral concept of education, the obvious place is the University–a place of teaching universal knowledge, that is knowledge relevant for building a better society, better nation, and a better world ultimately leading to the good of mankind as a whole. That is why, our Universities assume a central place in moulding youth into socially spirited citizens who lead a role of their choice in the social reconstruction. The social reconstruction that is expected of educated youngsters requires perspective, commitment, dynamism and vision whichever may be the field we may be engaged in our search for a livelihood. As Swami Vivekananda said, while we all eke out a living through education, we must also engage ourselves in the task of life-building and nation-building. Life-building is not merely getting a job for ourselves; it means contributing to the best of our abilities and imagination to make life easy for others around.

The importance of education in the challenging task of the socio-economic transformation of our country can hardly be overemphasized. It is the quality of education which makes us better citizens and inculcates in us virtues of tolerance, discipline, commitment, culture, compassion and sensitivity. It is only a good educational system that can establish a healthy relationship between the individuals and the society. The development of the individual enriches society; and a well-organised and free society provides ample opportunities for the individual to grow. In this endeavour, the parents, the teachers, the educational institutions themselves and the State as such play very important roles. In our country, education should help in reinforcing the lofty values of secularism and humanism and should strengthen the fabric of national integration. That is why Pandit Nehru said very eloquently about University:

> A University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for onward march of the human race towards higher objectives. If the Universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people. But, if the temple of learning itself becomes a home of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation progress or a person grow in stature?

It is stating the obvious that Universities not only impart knowledge, but also play a crucial role in the growth and progress of a nation. Apart from generating intellectual and professional environment, Universities create among students a thirst for knowledge and inquisitiveness. It is through

good University education that we can build a prosperous, egalitarian, inclusive and humane society. A University is not a place where formal education is imparted only to enable the students to earn a livelihood. It is a place where everyone strives for excellence; where youth, both boys and girls, are given such education which may liberate them from the clutches of deep-rooted prejudices, cramping customs, suffocating superstitions and stultifying traditions. True education is, indeed, a liberating force, bringing down all narrow barriers and enabling us to think critically and scientifically without fear or prejudice.

Friends, it is a well known fact that in India for years, education was monopolized by a very small segment of the society. That was why, we had not been able to recognize the value of education in achieving all round development of the country because the educated minority excluded themselves from the majority. In later years, the need was felt for its expansion. It is in this context that the concept of universal elementary education was incorporated into the Constitution of free India. Our commitment should be that all those who were denied education should now have access to quality education. This access should begin from the primary school. It is important to give education to all, because the lack of primary education impedes growth and development. As Prof. Amartya Sen has observed 'if we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure.'

It is a matter of deep regret that even today the mainstream education is available only to the more affluent sections of the population. There is a wide gap between the opportunities available to the rich, educated and urban-centered people and the poor, illiterate or semi-literate, rural and other disadvantageously placed sections. Socio-economic development is bypassing a significant segment of our population today as they do not have access to quality education relevant to their requirements. Only through universalisation of education, laying special stress on vocational education and on the education of the girl child can we bring about qualitative improvement in the lives of our people. Since our country has adopted the democratic way of life, we will be able to reap the benefits of democracy only through the full participation of all sections of our people in the process of nation-building.

It must be borne in mind by the younger generations that the political freedom we won in 1947 at much cost and sacrifice is only an opportunity. It is not a fulfilment by itself. We find today in our country, after more than six decades of Independence and the many impressive achievements, a wide-spread sense of dissatisfaction and frustration. If these are to be removed and if the younger elements, both young men and women, are to be persuaded to involve themselves in the work of internal consolidation and

development, it is essential to emphasize national unity, rapid economic development and a clean and honest administration. We must put down the forces that propagate divisive ideas and impair our national unity, retard our economic progress and earnestly strive to raise standards of efficiency and honesty in our administration. In this context, it is national unity, economic reconstruction and good governance that are the needs of the hour.

If we are to develop a strong democracy, political, social and economic, it is necessary for us to work hard and work in unison. The ideal of unity imposes on us a sacred responsibility. Men are not made democratic by the mere formulation of ideals in the Constitution. They are not made good by mere exhortations. The great ideals of justice, equality, fraternity and freedom which were the foundation of the French Revolution, which we have inscribed in our Constitution must be woven into the social fabric. As I said earlier, today there is much evidence of low morale, dissatisfaction and discontent among people, all leading to serious slackness in our march for an honourable place among the comity of nations. We must overcome this national slackness which seems to be enfeebling our community. For changing our mind-set, the Universities in India have to play a pivotal role in moulding youngsters to assume roles of responsibilities of leadership. That is why, a University, in the words of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, 'is a fellowship, devout in its admiration of what has been achieved in the past, yet believing in the richness of the future which lies before us all, a fellowship which transcends all barriers of race and nation, of class and creed and yet honours the artistic and intellectual traditions of a variety of peoples. The scholars and scientists are not always immune to the political passions which infect their countries. But in the pursuit of knowledge they, with their austerity and detachment, can rise above them and see in their political enemy their professional colleague. In the Universities at least we must be able to lift our gaze... breathe the pure air of disinterested inquiry.'

Friends, one area, requiring our most urgent attention, to my mind, is facilities for and the quality of research in our institutions of higher learning. Unfortunately, the infrastructure and the facilities for research are inadequate in most Universities. In modern times, the development and progress of a country in education is decided by the availability of facilities and equipment needed for research. Scientific progress in the country and social progress as such can be achieved only through quality research. Our scientists at the ISRO made us proud by successfully launching the Moon Mission *Chandrayan—I* from Sriharikota, which is not far away from here, with minimal of resources, proving that resolve, determination and dedication are also important in accomplishing great deeds in addition to the resources.

It is important to bear in mind that the primary social agenda of education is the development of our human resources in a manner which will meet with the larger national requirements. Our limited resources should not be wasted in the endeavours of confusing history and mythology with science. Education is essentially about rational enquiry. Ultimately, only through a progressive and forward looking education can we succeed in pulling down the walls that divide our people from one another and bring about an India truly integrated. To quote Gurudev Tagore: "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence" – that is the message of universal brotherhood which Gurudev preached.

'The inquisitive mind, the intuitive heart, the sensitive spirit and the searching conscience should be developed,' as Dr. Radhakrishnan exhorted us. In this age of science and technology, the internet and instant communication, we should serve not the power interests of the few but the human interests of the community as a whole. We must reduce inequalities and raise the standard of the common man. We want India to be free socially and economically by breaking away from fear and ignorance, self-interest and superstition, on the one hand and ensuring decent standards of living for the millions of toiling masses across the nation.

Universities and colleges are meant to be nurseries of youthful talent, repositories of the culture of the nation and custodians of national character. It is incumbent on them to live up to that ideal if India were to occupy its rightful place among the comity of nations. It is through the Universities that the students should acquire a proper sense of values and an attitude of settling differences by agreement.

Friends, today we are living through a critical stage in our nation's life. Intrigue, confrontation, divisiveness, religious bigotry and intolerance characterize our political life today. Our people, particularly our youth, are becoming increasingly cynical about the way our institutions of democracy are functioning. They are beginning to question the efficacy of democracy in addressing their concerns. Revulsion is beginning to creep into the people's mind about the content and quality of our democracy and about the declining values in our national life today. Our common people are wary about the emergence of divisive agenda in our national politics, about corruption eating into the vitals of our nation, about the intrusion of undesirable elements into the political arena, into our institutions of democracy, about the absence of consensus on important national issues today and about development not taking the centre-stage of political discourse in the country.

It is expected of all those associated with the institutions of democracy, at every level and of all organs, not to indulge in anything that could cause to undermine the credibility of our system. The negative public perception of politics and of those in public life should not be permitted to cloud the minds of the younger generations. Rather, they should be made to recognize that it is our collective and common responsibility to evolve ways and means to perfect our system of governance, rather than finding fault with it and running away from their responsibilities towards it.

An educated citizenry is the greatest asset of a democracy. They have to provide leadership to our society at large and become instruments of change. They should volunteer to join the task of nation-building and in holding the institutions of democracy accountable to the society. The students of today are the citizens of tomorrow. Radical changes in the socio-political scenario can be brought about only if our youth, driven by idealism and committed to the larger national causes and living above the issues that divide us, actively come forward into the arena of mainstream socio-political life.

Therefore, more and more committed, well-meaning people, positively and progressively disposed towards people's problems should come forward to occupy the political space in the country. This process has to start with our youth who are our future. They should realize that if they do not come forward to shoulder their responsibilities towards democracy actively, they will be only passive witnesses to the process of the gradual undermining of the best system of governance thoughtfully bequeathed to them by our Founding Fathers.

I would remind the young students, who have successfully completed their courses of study and have received their degrees at this convocation, that the coming years would open up various opportunities and, at the same time, present numerous challenges for you. Only with total commitment and dedication to the causes with which you get to associate in the years ahead, will you be able to make a mark on the society around you. It is in your ability to make that mark that the meaning, the content and the quality of the valuable years that you have spent in this great institution will have to be demonstrated. I hope the scholars will work hard to secure a bright future for themselves and for our country and by remaining firmly committed to certain ideals, by staying on the path of truth and by dedicating themselves to the service of the nation, they all will strive to make a difference to the world around them.

I wish the University community all the very best in their future endeavours to emerge as a prime centre of higher learning in the southern part of the country. I wish the students all the very best in their endeavours

to seek gainful employment and fulfilling careers through which, I hope, they will serve both the society and the nation. I sincerely wish that the hopes and aspirations of your days in the University are fulfilled in the years to come.

Thank you.

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN FACILITATING GENDER PARITY*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver the Convocation Address at the Banasthali University, a premier national institution for women's education. I am grateful to Shri Diwakar Shastri, the Chancellor, for his invitation to me to be here in this temple of learning for its Convocation and for the opportunity to address the University community on the occasion.

Notably Banasthali University, is the product of the vision of a great pioneer and social worker, Pandit Hiralal Shastri, whose mission was not only to work for rural reconstruction but also to dedicate himself to the noble cause of the uplift of girl children through education after he lost his beloved daughter, Shanta Bai. Pandit Shastri resigned in 1927 from Jaipur State Service to dedicate himself to social work. He selected Banasthali and trained a band of social workers to implement a programme of rural reconstruction out of which the foundation of Banasthali University was laid. Pandit Shastri was one of the foremost leaders representing the people of the Indian States during the National Freedom Movement, and became the first Chief Minister of Rajasthan after Independence, and a Member of the Second Lok Sabha. To him goes largely the credit of laying the foundation of a strong, unified and progressive Rajasthan.

Pandit Shastri's efforts at rural reconstruction and women's education was fully supported by his wife, Smt. Ratan Shastri, who inspired the women in rural Rajasthan to come out from the confines of their homes and to seriously devote themselves to studies. In due recognition of her remarkable contribution for spread of women's education, Smt. Ratan Shastri was honoured with Padmashri, Padmabhushan and the Jamnalal Bajaj Award. To her education was the manifestation of perfection in a human being.

Smt. Ratan Shastri and Pandit Hiralal Shastri together laid the foundation of the noble institution Banasthali Vidyapith and became the inspirational force behind its almost phenomenal growth. Their enduring love for their dear daughter, Shanta Bai, is reflected in the beautiful environs of this great institution. I am happy to know that the students of this University are

* At the Annual Convocation of the *Banasthali Vidyapith*, Banasthali, Rajasthan (26 March 2009).

housed in well-furnished rooms of the hostels, all named after Shanta Bai. On this special occasion, I pay my humble homage to the inspiring memories of Pandit Hiralal Shastri, a great and farsighted leader and selfless social worker, and Smt. Ratan Shastri for her great work on women's empowerment, and also commend the enormous contribution of their family in furthering their mission by the continued guidance to make Banasthali University one of the most reputed institutions in the country exclusively dedicated to women's education.

The journey from a small school with six pupils, about 74 years ago, to an autonomous Deemed University with an 'A' rating by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council speaks volumes of the achievements of this institution and the contribution of the management, faculty and students, who made it possible. It is significant that the institution has now eight different faculties of higher learning besides its school wing and opened a new Campus in Jaipur in 2001.

The University is founded on the twin pillars of nationalism and Indian culture with the aim of synthesizing the spiritual and ethical values and scientific achievements of the East and the West. The concept of *Panchmukhi* Shiksha that this institution has evolved to realize its vision of service to the nation and the development of Indian culture is most impressive, as it incorporates five aspects of education, namely, physical, practical, aesthetic, moral and intellectual. The students of this University are indeed privileged to have received higher education from an institution of high repute.

Before I proceed further, I would like to offer my heartiest congratulations to all the bright young students who have successfully completed their programme of study through strenuous work and disciplined effort and are going to receive their honours and degrees today. As they move out of the portals of the campus after the Convocation, they will find a new world of opportunities and challenges. I extend my best wishes to all of them and hope that they will make use of their knowledge and training to contribute towards nation-building and make a positive impact on the world around them while pursuing their own dreams and fulfilling their own ambitions.

It hardly needs emphasis that education is the most effective instrument to acquire knowledge, to nurture social and moral values and to make citizens socially sensitive, responsible and forward-looking. In a pluralistic society like ours, it is through broad-based and secular education that we can hope to foster values which help in promoting national integration and social harmony and in producing global citizens, prepared to take the world in their strides. Swami Vivekananda said: 'Education ... is a process of man-making, character-forming and life-building assimilation of ideas'.

It is only a good educational system that can establish a healthy relationship between the individuals and the society by inculcating in them the virtues of tolerance, discipline, commitment, culture, compassion and sensitivity which are the building blocks of a healthy society. 'Education', as Nobel Laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen said, is essentially about 'capacity building and it widens the choice of people and empowers the nations'.

Democracy underpins the dignity of the individual and is based on the assumption of the infinite value and worth of human personality, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, race, gender or religion. Education, among others, inculcates those social and moral values among the citizens, provides exposure to new ideas, liberates individuals from mental traps and suggests new lines of thought, throws up innovative solutions to old problems, creates different levels of aspirations and helps establish world-class benchmarks of achievements. One of the major tasks that education performs in a democratic society, is the preparation of young citizens for the roles and responsibilities they must be ready to take on in their years ahead, which is extremely crucial in a culturally, socially, linguistically and ethnically diverse society such as ours.

Traditionally in India, education was monopolized along caste, as well as class lines. Realizing the importance of education, the concept of universal elementary education was incorporated in our Constitution. But despite the efforts made by successive Governments, the literacy level in our country still remains abysmally low. It is disheartening that 37 per cent of our population lacks literacy skills. About 53 per cent of our children drop out at the elementary stage itself.

So far our socio-political system has failed to ensure that at least a majority of children between the ages of 6 and 14 are in school – instead of making up the world's largest child labour force. Around 53 per cent and 34 per cent of the children enrolled in Class I do not complete Class VIII and Class V respectively. Most of these are *Dalits* and *Adivasis* and remain labourers all their lives.

Gender disparity in education, as prevalent in our country, substantially weakens the our democratic fabric. According to the Planning Commission's National Human Development Report, 2001, the gender empowerment index was just 67.6 per cent in the early 90s, implying that women trailed by a third in human development indicators. There are many States where gender indicators are worse than in sub-saharan Africa. Such gender disparity is directly linked with gender inequality at the level of family and society. No doubt, the educational empowerment of our female population finds expression in the legal as well as programmatic framework of our national endeavour. Our Constitution is committed providing full and

compulsory education to all up to the age of 14 years irrespective of gender. The 86th Constitution Amendment Act, 2002 has made elementary education a fundamental right for all children in the age-group of 6 to 14 years. This apart, the National Policy on Education, 1986 and the Programme of Action, 1992 are the other guiding documents that focus on various aspects of women's educational empowerment. But unfortunately, the female literacy rate in our country is still strikingly lower than that of men.

Steps will have to be taken to ensure gender-parity in education by educating the families and communities about the benefits of girls' education and, if necessary, by providing incentives to enroll and retain the girls in schools. If we fail to overcome the obstacles to education, particularly in the case of women, a major portion of our population will be prevented from exercising their human rights. They will even be deprived of meaningful political participation. Democracy cannot thrive unless and until there is equal participation of men and women in politics, and different national activities and for that to happen, educational empowerment is a must. Removing the factors that hinder the full participation of women in the various spheres of society is, therefore, a very important concomitant towards the empowerment of our women.

This becomes all the more critical in view of the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution, reserving a third of the seats in the local elected bodies for women. There is a strong demand for similar reservation at the State and National levels. Surprisingly, it has been difficult to build a political consensus on the latter issue. It was my dream – among several others – that this historic Bill be passed during my tenure as the Speaker, Lok Sabha, but that was not to be, to my great sorrow.

Today, we can be proud that our country has made remarkable achievements in many fields. Our universities and institutions of higher learning have produced a good number of scientists and professionals who are making waves in their own fields. We are proud that our scientists have demonstrated more than once that they have the capacity to be the best in the world. Indian professionals are making an impact in several parts of the world today, as world-class professionals, in many fields, especially in management and in IT. India is widely recognized today as a potential knowledge hub. We must pay tributes to our scientists, researchers and professionals among whom there are many women, who brought about the Green Revolution, earned international acclaim for India in the field of space technology, made India an IT power and much more.

However, in spite of such progress, even more than sixty years after Independence, our country still has the largest number of illiterates in the world and there is wide disparity between the opportunities available to the

rich, educated and urban-centred people and the poor, illiterate or semi-illiterate, rural and other disadvantageously placed, and between men and women. Not only is there an unacceptably large proportion of illiterate population, there is also a major unfulfilled demand for quality public education at every level of learning and research. Socio-economic development is bypassing a significant segment of our population today, as they do not have access to quality education relevant to their requirements.

An important aspect of the challenge facing us is to bridge the urban-rural divide in educational investment and opportunities. To maintain our social progress and realize our economic potential, the concerns of our rural population have to be given adequate attention in our planning process. Rural India has a vast reservoir of human energy, intelligence and aspirations. Its enormous potential has to be converted into national wealth, by evolving education as an integrated package of traditional know-how, academic knowledge and practical skills, which could support the people to earn a livelihood both in the rural economy and outside of it, for which our system of education must look at vocational training.

In such a scenario, it is necessary to take urgent measures to ensure gender-parity in education by educating the families and communities about the benefits of girls' education by providing incentives to enroll and retain the girls in schools. If we fail to overcome the obstacles to education, particularly in the case of women, a major portion of our population will be prevented from exercising their fundamental human rights. Democracy cannot thrive unless and until there is equal participation of men and women in politics and different national activities, and for that to happen, educational empowerment is a must. Removing the factors that hinder the full participation of women in the various spheres of society is, therefore, a very important concomitant towards the empowerment of women.

I must highlight, in this connection, that literacy for women, must encompass legal literacy to equip them to stand up for their rights, resist societal oppression and firmly quash all moves to marginalize them and deprive them of dignity and a voice. I know that many of our citizens in rural areas, both male and female and especially women – who carry the major responsibility of looking after their families' interests – have barely any idea of laws that directly impact their day-to-day lives such as the gender-neutral (in terms of payment of wages) National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), Right to Information Act (RTI) and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. Information available with many of our citizens and specially rural women about other Constitutionally guaranteed Rights is extremely limited. The women, particularly those who are uneducated, are condemned to a life of drudgery, made more unbearable by

the burden of low self-esteem and are unfairly reduced to the pitiable condition of largely unappreciated, bearing and rearing machines. One may rightly say that literacy and information, on their own, are not adequate to take on an entrenched system that perpetuates suppression of women's rights and that accessing them requires financial and other related resources, which majority of Indian women do not possess. It is an imperfect situation and even the much-applauded judicial activism – hasn't really touched the core of women's problems in our country. However, the situation, while remaining imperfect, is not totally bereft of hope. There are reputed organizations, which are sincerely working to spread legal literacy and many of the *Panchayats* and State-supported Legal Aid Boards have put their weight behind this laudable endeavour. However, I appeal to you, who are associated with prestigious Institutions of learning, to reach out so that this has a cascading effect and impacts the democratic fabric in a much more tangible manner. Education along with legal literacy will, no doubt, play a seminal role in assisting women in struggles against discrimination, exploitation, inequalities and social injustice. This also applies to men, who have been denied access to education.

There has to be a symbiotic link between the importance of economic empowerment of women and the opening up of wider political spaces for them. The appreciation of this link will provide tremendous opportunities of self-expression and realization of women's inherent potential, not only, to their own but also the larger benefit of the family, society and the country. Education has the tremendous possibility of creating awareness about the options available and preparing women for suitable avenues of economic autonomy and independence. As you know, our country has had a great tradition of women's entrepreneurship and we need not look only at the formal avenues of employment and income-generation. While Indra Nooyi and Kiran Shaw Mazumdar do us proud, we cannot forget the enduring contributions of the likes of Ela Bhatt, who through vibrant grass-root level Organisations like SEWA and the Mahila Bank, have changed dramatically the lives of millions of ordinary, struggling women, for whom making daily ends meet, remains a stark, primary goal. Mohammad Yunus, the Nobel Laureate from neighbouring Bangladesh, has been duly recognized for Grameen Bank, his pioneering work on women-centred SHGs (Self Help Groups) and in India, too, the record of such Organisations has been truly impressive. You will be heartened to note that repayment rates in these SHGs in India is 99 per cent, which is a record, the world-over and needs to be celebrated.

I cannot but elaborate on the long term and dramatic changes that empowered women's participation in Institutions will bring about. I am convinced that they will lead the crusade — and that is what I truly believe is called for — to cleanse our polity and steer it safely away from divisiveness,

corruption and violence that sadly seems to be all pervasive today. The ills of communalism, institutionalized injustice to disadvantaged sections of society, intolerance and confrontational politics can well and truly be addressed largely through equitable gender participation.

According to the 2001 Census, women constitute 48.2 per cent of the country's population. For centuries, they have been accorded inferior status in our male-dominated society and their exploitation cuts across caste and class lines. Their struggle for survival starts well before their birth. Widespread prevalence of female foeticide and female infanticide are, in fact, a blot on our democracy. We know from experience that mere passing of laws is not enough to control women's exploitation at work places as well as at homes. Education will help them fight exploitation, but there has to be an attitudinal change of the society at large that is required as a duty to our women. It is a shame that even highly educated and professionally qualified people have been found to indulge in various kinds of exploitation of women. There will have to be conscious attempts to promote progressive and liberal thoughts to bring behavioural changes in the society.

It should always be borne in mind that the primary social agenda of education is the development of our human resources in a manner which will meet with the larger national requirements. Our limited resources should not be wasted in the endeavours of confusing faith with history and mythology with science. Education is essentially about rational enquiry. Ultimately, only through a progressive and forward-looking education can we succeed in pulling down the walls that divide our people from one another and bring about an India truly integrated. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said:

> A University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for onward march of the human race towards higher objectives. If the Universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people. But if the temple of learning itself becomes a home of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation progress or a person grow in stature?

Over the six decades of freedom, no doubt, we have made significant achievements in almost all areas of our national life. We have a progressive Constitution. Through the elections, we have consolidated our democratic edifice and emerged as the largest working democracy in the world. Through several progressive legislations, we have sought to address serious socio-political and developmental issues. Our legislations in the areas of democratic decentralization, women's empowerment, children's welfare, land reforms, and providing employment guarantee, among others, have helped in addressing many adverse legacies we had inherited at the time of freedom.

The adoption of the concept of Five Year Plans have helped us in taking substantial sections of our people from below the poverty level to a more meaningful and dignified existence. In recent years, our economy has been growing at a very fast pace. Today, India is acknowledged as a significant player in the world economy.

However, in spite of the substantial progress made in the last six decades, democratic India presents a contrasting picture of affluence and deprivation and India still lives in different centuries. On the one hand is the India of the rich, of those who have had the benefit of modern education and, on the other, is the India of those who live under conditions of poverty, deprivation, squalor, illiteracy, ignorance, intolerance and prejudices. With a stratified social structure, characterized by iniquity, gender-based discrimination, regional imbalances, with a sizeable section living below poverty line experiencing unemployment and underemployment, and with substantial sections of our people denied of the benefits of modern science and technology, without access to safe drinking water, dependable energy supply, and good health-care, we have to concede that we have not been able to take the fullest advantage of democratic governance in the past six decades.

Most unfortunately and rather alarmingly, issues like intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, confrontation and disrespect for dissent are increasingly vitiating our socio-political system. Confrontational politics has made caste, creed, language, region and religion divisive issues, seeking to mould public opinion around them and sections of our political spectrum is depending on the same to get political advantage by emphasizing on issues that divide the people than what unite them. Various segments of our society are also tending to increasingly ignore our most cherished national values such as secularism, socialism, respect for pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance and co-existence for the sake of power.

Our people, particularly our youth, are becoming more and more cynical about the way our institutions of democracy are functioning. They are beginning to question the efficacy of democracy in addressing their concerns. If we have to sustain people's faith in the democratic institutions, we shall have to bring about integrity in our public life. Communalization and criminalization of politics has greatly vitiated our political system. The malaise of corruption and the influence of money and muscle power along with the use of religion in our electoral process and the resultant aberrations of our political functioning are matters that should engage the attention of all responsible citizens. Degeneration of the electoral system, as a result of the illegal and unethical practices used in many places for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity. We must recognize that democracy is not all about periodic elections and the

political rights alone. It is fundamentally about providing for the basic needs of the people.

To the students of this University and to the educated youth, I would like to remind that the society has large expectations on them. They have to provide leadership to our society at large and become instruments of change. They should volunteer to join the task of nation building and in holding the institutions of democracy accountable to the society. I call upon the youth and particularly the students to take part more actively in public affairs, so that we can have their proper participation in the democratic process and for the governance of this country. Radical changes in the socio-political scenario can be brought about if our youth, driven by idealism and committed to the larger national causes and avoiding the issues that divide us, actively come into the arena of mainstream socio-political life.

In this context, let us remind ourselves of what Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore said in his Convocation Address at the Banaras Hindu University in 1935:

> As a people we must be fully conscious of what we are... The fact is, we have a feeble human interest in our own country. We love to talk about politics and economics; we are ready to soar into the thin air of academic abstractions, or roam in the dusk of pedantic wildernesses; but we never care to cross our social boundaries and come to the door of our neighbouring communities, personally to enquire how they think and feel and express themselves, and how they fashion their lives... The best function of our Education Centres is to help us to know ourselves and then along with it, the other mission will be fulfilled, which is to inspire us to give ourselves to society.

Our people, particularly the youth, should realize that the destiny of a nation is built upon the character of its citizens in the shaping of which education plays an important role. Whether it is in public life or in student life, we cannot reach great heights if we lack in character and discipline. Democracy is only as good as its people. It can become meaningful when educated persons, committed to national causes, come forward to eliminate the shortcomings in the system. If you all cherish and uphold the principles of secularism, pluralism and inclusiveness, who can undermine our national unity and social cohesiveness? And conversely, if you surrender to the divisive and communal approaches, can any one save this country?

We have too many unrealistic critics in our country who themselves do not want to play or recognize any role in restoring politics into the framework of an acceptable value system, but not many who want to intervene pro-actively to correct the aberrations. Everyone seems to think that it is sufficient to point out the defects in the system and be a critic only and it is someone

else's responsibility to bring about the changes. It is of little use to be just critical of the aberrations or non-achievements in the society. You have to be participants in bringing about the change and not be mere critics. The country has great expectations from its youth specially the young educated women to bring in the freshness of their approach along with youthful energy and passion to address the imperfections in the institutions of democracy. They have to realize their obligations and become more pro-active participants at all levels of political and other institutions.

It is with an idea to sensitize our young Members of Parliament about the issues and challenges before the youth and to promote greater awareness and focussed deliberations on the issues related to youth that I took the initiative to set up a Parliamentary Forum on Youth, after being elected as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, and the Forum came up with various suggestions, emphasizing on the need to promote scientific temperament and value-based education. I am also glad to know that you have a Students' Parliament as part of your *Panchmukhi Shiksha*. I am sure it is a good way of familiarizing the students with the processes and functioning of the highest peoples institution in the country.

Dear students, you have always to bear in mind that the future does not belong to those who are complacent and content with today, conveniently ignoring and being indifferent to the larger social milieu and its stark realities. The future would rather belong to those who are ever receptive to new thinking, new ideas and bold initiatives. It is this quality that I would expect of those who will receive their honours and degrees today to carry with them when they are leaving the protective portals of their University.

Convocation is a landmark in the lives of the students and the faculty. For all those who pass out today, the coming years would open up various opportunities and at the same time present numerous challenges. I hope the scholars will work hard to secure a bright future for themselves and for the country by remaining firmly committed to the path of truth, justice and probity, fighting against social evils and by dedicating themselves to the service of the nation, by taking active part in public affairs, and by striving to make a difference to the world around them.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the Banasthali University once again for according me the opportunity to associate myself with this Convocation. I hope this University will continue to produce responsible, confident, disciplined and socially sensitive citizens and educated women of courage who will serve the society and the nation with sincerity and commitment which will strengthen our democracy. I convey my best wishes to all.

Thank you.

COMPARATIVE CONTEXTS OF DISCRIMINATION: SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICIES*

I am happy to associate myself with this International Seminar on an extremely important topic, namely, 'Comparative Contexts of Discrimination: Social Exclusion and Equal Opportunity Policies in Asia' being organized here by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.

I understand that this International Conference has been organized to discuss the problems of social groups which have suffered from denial of equal opportunities and equal rights due to their social background, like race, colour, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality or social origin which exist in many nations in the world under diverse social, economic and political systems.

The spheres of discrimination varies from country to country. Denial of equal opportunities often lead to low level of education, unequal access to civil rights, lower participation in governance and high poverty and deprivation among the excluded groups.

I understand that the participants who have come from various countries from Asia and India will discuss the nature of discrimination suffered by the various social groups based on their social identity. The participants will also discuss the consequences of discrimination on the social and economic condition of groups which have suffered from exclusion and discrimination and will also discuss equal opportunities policies (like affirmative action and reservation policies) used by the governments in countries in Asia for inclusive progress of all individuals.

It is quite important that about ten countries from Asia will share their experiences. These, I understand, include India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan from South Asia and China, Malaysia, Philippines, Japan, from East Asia and New Zealand from the Pacific. The experiences of the countries from Asia will definitely benefit the other countries in using each other's experiences in developing suitable 'Inclusive Policies'.

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* At the inauguration of the International Conference on *Comparative Contexts of Discrimination: Social Exclusion and Equal Opportunity Policies in Asia* organized by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi (6 May 2009).

I heartily compliment the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies for the admirable work they have been doing for providing knowledge support to the deprived sections of our society and also for acting as the resource centre for them. The Founding Fathers of our Constitution had visualized an egalitarian society, where every citizen would have the right to optimize his of her potential. In this context, the endeavours of organizations like the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies are indeed praiseworthy in providing invaluable services to promote the cause of the socially deprived sections.

It is a matter of grave concern that the practices of discrimination and exclusion in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres are common to several societies, though their nature and consequences vary from one country to another. Discrimination and social exclusion lead to widening of inequalities, deprivation of equal opportunities and lack of access to national resources. It applies equally to India and other Asian countries, where discrimination is largely based on caste, gender, religion and regional and ethnic identities.

It has been acknowledged that social exclusion finds its parallel in poverty, inequality, deprivation, alienation and marginalisation in society. Social stratification is also one of its variants. In broader terms, various forms of social exclusion can be identified in the context of societies like ours which may include exclusion from goods and services, labour markets, land, security — both physical and environmental — security of livelihood, human rights, protection against contingencies such as illness and death and above all exclusion from macro-economic developmental strategies, which can encompass life and livelihood as a whole, and can severely restrict participation in social services, welfare and security networks, consumer culture and even in political choices. It goes without saying that inclusiveness of the marginalized groups is an intensive process and this has to be increasingly balanced with the need for sensitive facilitation to build the confidence of vulnerable groups to participate as well as to change attitudes and hierarchies that hinder their development.

In India, we have recognized the problems of several social groups, which have suffered in from denial equal opportunity in the past. They also continued to suffer from the exclusion and discrimination due to their cultural/social identity like caste, ethnicity, gender, religion and other in various spheres of our society, polity and economy. We have social groups like Scheduled Castes, which have suffered from the intense discrimination and social exclusion in the past. They were denied equal rights to education, property, civil and religious rights. Then there are Scheduled Tribes which suffered from physical and social and cultural isolation. The Other Backward classes also suffered form backwardness which is similar to that of scheduled caste. There are

other groups like nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes and De-notified tribes which have also suffered from isolation and backwardness. The women and certain religious minorities also have suffered from discrimination and denial of equal rights in several spheres, namely, lack of education, high poverty, lack of access to resources, denial of civil rights and political rights.

The Indian Constitution is firmly based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination. The Directive Principles of our Constitution calls upon the States to undertake safeguards against discrimination and use policy measures for educational and economic development of the discriminated groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and others. It also requires the Government to take steps for providing equal participation in political governance.

In recognition of this constitutional obligation, the Government has developed several equal opportunity policies in the form of reservation in education, government employment, public housing and legislature for SCs and STs and in selected spheres for the Other Backward classes and for women and religious minorities. The Government has also enacted Civil Right Act, like Anti-Untouchability Act of 1955, Preventions of Atrocities against SCs and STs and other similar Acts.

These Acts have provided protection against discrimination and social exclusion. The Equal Opportunities Policies have yielded good results leading to educational and economic development. These reservation policies in political spheres have enabled these groups to participate in governance.

In the present context, our country needs to deal with the phenomena of exclusion, which are historical, contemporary, social, political as well as developmental in nature. As you all know, historical exclusion refers to the persistence of caste and gender discrimination in society, which pre-date this century. The latter ranges from foeticide carried out through the application of modern technology to diminished status and role for women. Social exclusion can also be discerned in the educational and health sectors where preference is given to men than women. It is a societal phenomenon, which cuts across gender and caste.

The groups which are now seeking equal opportunity are asking for similar policies, in the form of reservation. New groups which are asking for equal opportunities include Women, Religious minorities like Muslims, *Dalit* Christians, *Dalit* Muslims, and similar groups.

We have to address the problem of these new groups. However, while considering the claims of various social groups, it is necessary to recognize that while the problems of the discriminated groups at one level are similar, there are also a difference in the nature of their problem which vary from group to group.

Several studies indicate that development exclusion has got several variants. One is evident in the denial or restriction of opportunities of certain social groups in the process of development; the other refers to the obsolescence of traditional occupations and consequently the emergence of new poor; and the last can be seen in the displacement of the poor due to development projects. This has caused threats to life and livelihood and has led to protests and social movements in different parts of the country.

The first Human Development Report published in 1990, in its opening words, said: 'The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives.' The Report further states that in today's pursuit of material and financial wealth and power, this simple truth is often forgotten. People are no more the main concern today; they are put last. Thus, inequality resulting from legitimization of unfair distribution of scarce goods and services cause social unrest and upheavals. The objective of a new social order is to produce new forms of power and dominance by rejecting and altering the persisting discriminations in the polity and society.

The purpose of development, it has been argued by development economists and political analysts, has to be seen as creating an environment in which the marginalized and exploited peoples can grow and live healthy and creative lives. This cannot be brought about through a mere economic competition which squeezes out human concern, which exploits the weak and promotes the interest of a few and amass wealth and power for some at the cost of others. It is only when the socially marginalized and exploited people are given their rightful share that there can be justice and equality.

In order to deal with social exclusion, several strategies have been attempted ever since Independence. As mentioned, the Indian Constitution has provided for affirmative action favouring the marginalized sections of society, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to correct the historical social aberrations. Over the years, women and persons suffering from disabilities have also been included in its domain. Different strategies like enactment of laws, political mobilization, coalitions or alliances in governance and executive orders have been tried out. Economic growth, wage employment, self-employment, land reforms, provision of subsidy, loan and credit, welfare, promotion of co-operatives, self-help groups for women's social and economic empowerment, social activism, organizing the poor, inclusion of social concerns in the election manifestos of political parties, and special grants to backward regions present wide ranging strategies. They have been tried out by the State, voluntary organizations, trade unions, co-operatives, community groups and organizations.

With a view to providing justice to the weaker sections, various measures have been adopted such as removal of disabilities, granting of civil rights, provision of constitutional safeguards to prevent their economic exploitation and to provide them protection against atrocities. Besides these, welfare measures have been adopted with a view to reducing their dependence and making them self-reliant. These efforts have not gone in vain and they certainly have brought some significant positive results. The overall conditions of the under-privileged sections have improved but as compared to their advanced counterparts the pace of their progress has been relatively very slow.

We all agree that the problems of discriminated groups in the context of our society are dual in nature. Several social thinkers have suggested that some kinds of problems emanate from the lack of access to income earning capital assets like agricultural land, capital for business, quality employment and education, particularly due to denial of the same in the past for long periods of time, the consequences of which are visible today in the form of inter-group inequality in several indicators of human development. The other kinds of problems are in the form of persistence of discrimination in various societal transactions. Therefore, several perceptive observers have stressed that the discriminated groups require dual solution – one set of remedies are required to improve the ownership of land and capital assets, quality employment and education as compensation for that denial in the past, and another set of remedies are required to provide safeguards against discrimination. While the first set of remedies must be based on the justification of the principle of compensation for denial of rights in the past, the second set of remedies must be based on the assumption of providing safeguards against discrimination to ensure the due share and participation of the affected people in all areas of national life.

It is expected that the governmental policies aimed at social, educational and economic empowerment of the people will help enhance the capacity of discriminated groups to take advantage of the country's social and economic progress. It is, however, necessary to recognize that economic and educational empowerment alone will not suffice; it will only empower the discriminated groups to enable them to make use of the ongoing economic and social progress, but will not ensure the ultimate use due to continuing discrimination, including the supply of social needs such as education and health.

In the absence of an equal opportunity policy in the form of affirmative action, the discriminated groups may continue to face discrimination. It is precisely for this reason that equal opportunity policies, which must be complementary to the policy of general economic empowerment, needs to be developed and implemented. The complementary nature of such policies will ultimately help the historically discriminated groups to receive their due share in economic and social progress.

Any democratic society faces the challenge of harmonizing two essentially contradictory political concepts – one, equality before the law irrespective of religion, caste, creed, race, and gender and the other social justice at the cost of the same commitment for equality before the law. Efforts have accordingly been made to provide redress for the underprivileged sections through the policy of reservations or quotas for them in government jobs, seats in educational institutions and legislatures, and in governmental aid, loans and other developmental assistance.

Due to variation in the forms and spheres of discrimination, the consequences on the social, educational and economic situation of each of these groups also vary from group to group. Difference in inter-group inequalities in the human development points towards the consequences on access to property, business, employment, education, civil and cultural rights in varying degree to various social groups.

We in India, have developed policies, particularly for the SCs and ST in legislature, education, public employment, public housing and selectively for OBCs in education and employment and for women in local *Panchayat*. However, it is also necessary that the problems of other groups (other than SCs, STs and OBCs), like women, religious minorities and lower caste from different religions who continue to suffer from discrimination and educational and economic backwardness needs to be addressed through proper policies. The State must develop an inclusive policy for multiple groups, suffering from exclusion associated with caste, ethnicity, religion and gender.

An important issue therefore is to develop group specific inclusive policy to overcome the consequences of discrimination. Currently in India we are discussing the alternative ways of overcoming the deprivation suffered by various excluded groups such as other backward classes, *dalits* in different religious groups, religious minority and women.

Given the exclusionary nature of our economy, policy, society, culture and governance, it is necessary that we develop an inclusive policy which will ensure due representation and participation of all in the gains of social and economic development. Our economy, polity, society and governance will have to be more participatory and representative of various castes, ethnic, religious groups and women and this will make our democracy more inclusive and meaningful to all.

This Conference has been organized at an appropriate time, when we are looking for policies to address the problems of multiple groups. Recognizing this, our 11th Five Year Plan talks not only about Economic Growth but is focused on 'Inclusive Growth', the growth that will benefit all particularly the poor and excluded social groups.

This Conference is going to discuss the experience of Asian countries of the 'Inclusive policies'. I hope, the deliberation will result in arriving at solutions, which will help the States to develop policies, which will make the society more inclusive and participatory.

The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies have very rightly organized this international seminar to deliberate on the changing nature and forms of discrimination and specific problems of the discriminated groups in select countries in Asia. I am happy to inaugurate this Seminar and I am sure the participants will have very meaningful discussions. I wish the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies all success in their endeavours.

Thank you.

V

ROLE OF THE FOURTH ESTATE IN ENHANCING DEMOCRATIC VALUES

LESSONS OF THE FOURTEENTH LOK SABHA ELECTIONS*

It gives me great pleasure to be amidst you here this afternoon and to associate myself with this Conference, organised by the National Media Centre.

Friends, holding of regular and periodic elections based on universal adult suffrage in a vast country like ours with a nearly 670 million strong electorate spread over 28 States and 7 Union territories of varied sizes, and around seven lakh polling stations, is indeed a stupendous task. The professionalism with which our Election Commission has been going about the task of conducting periodic elections has earned it laurels from the world over. The successful conduct of the elections to the Fourteenth Lok Sabha by the Commission with the citizens exercising their franchise through Electronic Voting Machines in all the constituencies, for the first time since Independence, marks a significant step towards improving the electoral process in the country.

What is the principal lesson of the 2004 elections? We may differ in our answers but it may be difficult to overlook a very important lesson and that, to my mind, is the ability of our so called 'ill-fed and illiterate' masses to give shock-treatment to our political classes. It is this remarkable quality of our people, to judge the prevailing political situation with their own innate intelligence, often disproving the learned political pundits, that stands out of all our elections. Elections 2004 once again emphatically proved this quality of our voters.

Decades back, when Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was confronted with the question, " After Nehru who?", his studied response was "three hundred and sixty million people"—that was the population of India then. And that was the kind of confidence our Founding Fathers had in our people to work a democratic system in our country, even when sceptics around us thought that the poor economic conditions, low literacy, hierarchical societal structure, and the multiple ethnic, religious and linguistic cleavages would make it impossible for democracy to survive in our country. But today, proving all the sceptics wrong, we have come a long way and parliamentary democracy is so deeply entrenched in our country, and has become part of our lives.

* At the inauguration of the Conference on *Lessons of the 2004 Lok Sabha Elections—Role of Media, State and the People*, New Delhi (20 August 2004).

The lesson, therefore, that we need to learn from our recent elections is that, first of all, we should not take our voters for granted, for they are capable of judging issues on merit weighing them against the yardstick of the possible impact they could make on their lives. The common people expect our political discourses to be based on issues that could make a positive impact on their lives. Winning elections on mere slogans has become a thing of the past. Providing education and healthcare, removal of poverty and unemployment and preservation of communal unity are more crucial for the common masses than talking about emotive issues that could divide our people and weaken our social fabric.

Several observers had concluded at the end of the 14th Lok Sabha Elections that the election was fought more in the media than in the streets. Seen from the angle of the traditional role of the media as an information provider, on the face of it, such a conclusion could be justified. The election, to my mind was fought at different levels; Media was one of them. But simultaneously, perhaps in a discreet way, the decisive electoral battle was taking place in our remote villages. Both produced a result more or less identical, but one different from what our mainstream media had predicted. There was some error in the judgment or in the methodologies adopted in arriving at the conclusions.

No doubt, the media did play an important role in the elections; their representatives spent as many sleepless nights as did many of us. They were very enthusiastically involved in the entire process of the elections all along. A free media is as much a product of democracy as is one of its crucial supporting pillars—its "first line of defence" to quote an eminent journalist.

The media, as an effective interface between the citizens and the representative institutions, plays a vital role for the growth of democracy. While drawing its strength from the political system, it also infuses strength and vitality into the system. The need, therefore, for an independent and free media to support the functioning of a vibrant democracy cannot be overemphasized. An informed society certainly contributes substantially towards creating an informed democracy.

Needless to say, a significant section of our people have now started forming their opinions on political issues on the basis of what they learn from the media. However, to my mind, it is too early to ignore the importance of public meetings and door-to-door campaigning by the candidates. This is possibly one of the conclusions we can arrive at from our experience of the recent elections. You may have very detailed data about each of our constituency—the demographic characteristics there, the caste and religious equations there, etc. on your super-computer in Delhi, but unless you interact with your voters, try to understand their problems and empathise with them

and relate to them sincerely our people will not give you a chance to represent them in our Parliament.

Politics and political processes having become increasingly competitive and with the growing interest in democracy and elections within the media and with the wider reach of the electronic media, the opinion and exit polls conducted by the media are gaining considerable importance and popularity. It is a different matter that the opinion and the so called exit polls of 2004 elections proved to be quite off the mark. Surprisingly, not a single exit poll was able to even come close to the final verdict of the voters. No one had a clue as to what the people were thinking. The credit for this undoubtedly goes to our prudent voters, who kept their judgment very close to their hearts, till the last moment.

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that the exit and the opinion polls do have the potential to influence the electorate that still hasn't voted, especially in a country like ours where elections are staggered over a number of days. There are very few countries where exit polls take place in the middle of elections. The unrestricted and uncontrolled publication and telecast of the opinion polls before the completion of the process of voting is not very beneficial to the cause of democracy as it undermines the notion of 'fairness' attached to the electoral process and gives scope for attributing manipulative intentions behind those who indulge in it. The ultimate result would be that the credibility of the media, an important pillar of our democracy, itself could be adversely affected.

May I also mention, without being misunderstood, that the publicity campaign in the media, through the mechanism of publication of advertisements before the election with Government's expenses with intent to influence public mind, was a method that has to be considered both by the Government and the media about its appropriateness in a democratic set up, where, by use of public resources, benefit was sought to be achieved by the ruling party or combination. It is not so much a question of legality but of ethics, for the Government as well as for the media. Sometimes commercial considerations may have to be compromised for strengthening the democratic process.

Friends, it is an accepted fact that the electoral process in the country has developed certain aberrations over the years. Unfortunately, degeneration of the electoral system, as a result of the illegal and immoral practices used for winning elections, has been corroding the true representative and democratic character of our polity. The basic issues that should compel us to ponder over and address today, are the criminalisation and the communalisation of politics, the vicious role played by money and muscle powers, the inadequate representation of women and more significantly, the declining voter

participation in the polls. In highlighting all these issues, our media has been playing a noticeable role. Sustained pressure will help the country in addressing these aberrations with greater success.

There is no doubt that the State has a crucial role in ensuring that elections are free and fair and are conducted according to the constitutional provisions and the rules and regulations laid down for that. Besides, it must ensure that all segments of our society, particularly our women and the weaker sections, are able to exercise their right to vote freely and fearlessly. The use of violence and muscle power has been on the increase of late. Only an effective State machinery can combat this before the menace assumes dangerous proportions, threatening the very foundation of our democracy. Similarly, the State must ensure that the policies and programmes of all political parties, irrespective of their ideology, are given adequate coverage in the Government media so that there could be a level playing field.

The issue of electoral reforms has been discussed and debated a number of times before, both in Parliament and on many public fora. Every election brings into sharp focus the serious inadequacies in our electoral system. It goes without saying that these shortcomings have a direct bearing on governance and on the functioning of the elected bodies. It is the common people who are the ultimate sufferers of a flawed election process.

Electoral reforms, therefore, must become a matter of high priority for the entire country and, especially, the political class. Particularly worrisome is the mounting cost of fighting elections, which is at the root of political corruption. It is also related to the other dangerous trend: increasing entry of criminals into politics. It has been felt that the State funding of elections will, to some extent, minimize the pernicious effect of black money in the election, but the report of the Indrajit Gupta Committee, of which I had the honour to be a member and which dealt with the issue, is unfortunately, gathering dust in the archives of the North Block. One of the earlier decisions of Shri L.K. Advani as Home Minister was to appoint the Committee and though the Report has been unanimous on various subjects dealing with electoral reforms and State funding, no action has been taken for nearly over four years.

However, it has to be kept in mind that, in the ultimate analysis, even a reformed electoral system is only as good as the efficacy of the enforcement machinery. It is not enough to make laws, they must be strictly enforced.

In a developing country, like ours, basic issues such as, food, shelter, clothing, unemployment, health care, etc. are the issues uppermost in the minds of the people and as such they expect these issues to be on top of the agenda of our political parties. It should be kept in mind that unless the pressing problems of the masses are addressed, no political party can succeed.

Friends, I must not fail to mention on this occasion that this time, a record number of newcomers—more than 40 per cent—have been elected to the Lok Sabha, many of them are young. The country has great expectations from the young parliamentarians. It is a challenge for them to come up to those expectations.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the organizers for giving me this opportunity to associate with this important Conference here and to share my views with you all. With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate this Conference. I hope that the deliberations at the Conference will throw up new ideas for strengthening the edifice of democracy in our country.

Thank you.

PARLIAMENT, PRESS AND THE PEOPLE: REINFORCING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE*

I am indeed honoured to be amidst this distinguished gathering. I am grateful to the Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ) and the Appan Menon Trust for giving me this opportunity to share my views with you on this topic of immense significance to our democracy. I compliment the DUJ for its consistent endeavours in safeguarding the freedom and rights of the Press in the country.

Friends, Parliament and the Press are the two most vital components of any democratic structure, with both trying to nurture a common constituency, *i.e.* the people. The Parliament and the Press actually share a special relationship in this context. While the Parliament is expected to debate on the issues of governance and development and enact laws for regulating the lives of the people and for improving their lot, the Press is expected to inform the public about the activities of the Government and the happenings in Parliament while at the same time highlighting their urges, aspirations and grievances.

Freedom of the Press is an integral principle of any democratic society. Without a free Press, democracy is inconceivable. When we speak of the freedom of the Press, we have to take into account all the three essential elements of it: freedom of access to all sources of information; freedom of publication; and freedom of circulation. It is from this that we can delineate the importance of the right to information, publication and circulation. A democratic society must provide for all these and in particular free debate and free and fearless exchange of ideas. It is only by means of free discussion and positive criticism that the Government can remain responsive to the urges and concerns of the people, especially the deprived and the downtrodden.

The freedom of the Press, generally includes the right to critically analyse and report on the actions of the Government and to express divergent opinions on various issues. The voicing of dissent alone is not enough; there must be something more positive than mere expression of dissent. It is also the duty of the Press to bring about an awareness among the people and focus on

* At the inauguration of the Seminar on *Parliament, Press and the People*, Constitution Club, New Delhi (23 February 2005).

economic, social and political issues which are of crucial importance for national progress and prosperity. A vibrant and vigilant Press can help in promoting an enlightened public opinion which is an important prerequisite for the smooth functioning of democracy in the country. In this context, I must stress that in spite of the Satellite TV revolution and the wider access to Internet, it is the print media which still has much farther reach to all parts of the country. As such, they, particularly the language Press, have an added responsibility in safeguarding democracy and freedom.

Parliament, being the supreme representative institution, is the prime forum for national debate and it is in its Chambers that the Government is made accountable for all its actions. The Press is the most important medium of information about governmental and parliamentary activities as far as the people are concerned. Taking the performance of the Parliament to the people is thus a very crucial aspect of strengthening our democratic edifice.

During the last Session of our Parliament, we launched two separate channels for the live telecast of the proceedings of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. We believe that this endeavour will bring Parliament nearer to the people and it will provide a living link between the people and the Parliament. We are also planning better interactions with the media through our Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training this year. I would seek your cooperation in making this a truly meaningful initiative. I am sure both the institution of Parliament and the Press will stand to benefit from that.

Friends, there is a growing body of opinion in our country today that there has been a decline of Parliamentary standards and that much of its precious time is wasted in uproar and tumult. As a Presiding Officer, I too share this concern. It is understandable that the rough and tumble of political discourse would find its reflection in the Chambers of Parliament and this is as it should be. But then, we have to ensure that such discourse does not degenerate into repeated disturbance and disorder. After all, the nation looks up to Parliament and its members for leadership. Thankfully, all concerned are taking a serious view of the situation and I trust that through concerted action, we can change the image substantially, and in this endeavour, I would seek the cooperation of the media also.

While disturbance and disorder should be reported, it is important that the media provide more coverage to the serious and substantive discussions taking place in the Chambers. This will work as a disincentive to a minority of members who would like to play to the gallery and will be an incentive to a majority of those who do serious work to be effective parliamentarians.

As you are aware, a large quantum of work of the Parliament is being handled in its Committees. I agree that as of today, the Committee proceedings

are not open to the Press, a matter which is under our consideration. The media coverage of Parliament should be comprehensive to also cover the meaningful work being done in its Chambers and the Committees.

The Press plays an important role in raising socially relevant issues through its columns. Since the journalists enjoy a wider reach and get to sense the ground reality, a proper coverage of such social, economic and developmental issues would help in catching the attention of the members of Parliament and enable them to raise these in our Legislatures. In this way, the Press becomes a catalyst in the developmental process and in strengthening our democratic institutions. The Press also plays the crucial role of an educator and opinion maker. In the political context, regular reports on parties, candidates and their planks help a common man in forming his or her opinion, especially at election times. It is at election times that the credibility of the media is put to test the most. A frequent complaint against the journalists in this connection is that they indulge in partisan reporting. The media should not be allowed to be manipulated by vested interests to influence public opinion and has to be constantly vigilant against such attempts. The media reports should be factual and objective and in that any bias or sensationalism and the opinion of the editor or of the reporter should be expressed through the editorials and signed articles. Self-regulation, rather than censorship dictated by others, would be the best bet in those situations.

In the peculiar Indian context, I would also like to emphasize that it is our joint responsibility to nurture and promote nationally accepted values such as democracy, secularism, pluralism, etc. The fact is that we are a developing nation and though we have achieved much since Independence, we still have a long way to go before we are able to overcome poverty, illiteracy and iniquities. It will only be possible if we concentrate on building a more humane, progressive and an inclusive India. Undoubtedly, the Parliament has the primary responsibility in this.

Friends, internationally, there is a movement for a more informed democracy everywhere. Global trends cannot but impact us. The idea behind the concept is that an informed public, supplemented by better accountability and more transparency at all levels of governance, can facilitate good governance and development. An informed electorate will also be able to participate more purposively in the democratic processes. Across the world, the concept of 'right to know' is increasingly being emphasised in the context of good governance. The proposed Right to Information Bill is particularly significant in this context. The Press can also play a very proactive role in this regard. However, all these will remain empty promises if all of us concerned — Parliamentarians, political parties, the media personnel, academics and social workers, that is, all components of the civil society -- work together in a harmonious manner, with the welfare of the people uppermost in their minds.

I see journalism as a great mission in a democracy. There is a symbiotic relationship between institutions in a democracy. If we do anything that could weaken any of its organs, its impact will inevitably be felt on the system as a whole. Unlike just about every other activity, we cannot allow our Press to be a market-place-driven product. Like the other three estates of a democracy, or perhaps of even greater importance, is the media in a democracy. Some may like to look at it as an industry and the newspapers as the product and let themselves to be subjected to the rules of the market, may be of the so-called global market. If we succumb to such temptations, we will be undermining one of the crucial pillars of our democracy. The recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on IT last year, specifically suggesting that the FDI in the print media is not in the long-term interest of the country has to be seen from this perspective.

Friends, being the representatives of the media, working from the capital city, you all get first hand information on all developments and you also have easy access to all the Ministries, Departments and members of Parliament and, as such, you are exposed to the political hub of the country. Your words have tremendous power and I would urge you to use it to strengthen democracy, to further the interests of the common masses and pull up those in public life if they make mistakes. I am sure that our journalist friends would keep the flame of truth, objectivity, freedom and justice burning bright so as to strengthen our democratic institutions. With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Seminar and hope that the deliberations here will throw up new ideas and perspectives which will go a long way in further reinforcing the democratic institutions in our country.

Thank you.

ROLE OF MEDIA IN A DEMOCRACY*

I am indeed happy to be here today and to associate myself with the Ceremony to lay the foundation stone for the new building, the *M. Hanumantha Rao Pranganam*, for *Praja Shakti*. On this occasion, I pay my humble tributes to all those selfless, socially committed leaders like Comrade P. Sundarayya and Comrade Hanumantha Rao, who guided its progress during the formative years through difficult times, under very trying circumstances, and made it what it is today.

Praja Shakti, down its history of more than sixty years, has emerged as one of the most shining examples of a socially sensitive and responsible daily, articulating the concerns of the working class and the deprived and the disadvantaged. It has also been the voice of the progressive and revolutionary sections of the Telugu society. The daily has consistently stood for certain eternal values such as equity, socio-economic justice, fundamental human rights, etc. Its growth over the years, from a periodical in 1942 to a weekly and, eventually, into a popular daily, with six editions today, is indeed commendable. But what is most significant is the fact that it has not detracted from its core values and has continued to espouse the cause of the teeming millions in Andhra Pradesh with the same vigour and zeal. Though it is a Telugu Daily, the values it stands for and the causes it promotes are of great relevance for the whole country.

True to its name, *Praja Shakti* symbolizes people's power in a democratic society. In over six and a half decades of its existence, it has gone through various trials and tribulations and faced and overcome repression and restrictions. Despite these obstacles and hurdles *Praja Shakti* has come out triumphant, and continues to take up the causes that inspired its origin, without compromising on journalistic ethics and the larger national values. Many leading figures associated with this daily, like Comrades P. Sundarayya and M. Hanumantha Rao and several others, have also been an integral part of both the political and the intellectual sides of the Communist Movement in the country.

I am aware of the trying situations under which the Communist Parties worked in those early years and the many difficulties they had to surmount.

* At the ceremony to lay the foundation stone for the new building of the newspaper, *Praja Shakti*, Hyderabad (25 March 2005).

It is a tribute to the determination of these veteran Comrades and their commitment to the cause that *Praja Shakti* survived all odds, succeeded in spreading the message of the Communist Movement and earned a special place in the esteem of the Telugu people, cutting across all socio-political divide.

The Press is one of the main pillars of democratic State, its 'last line of defence', as an eminent journalist put it. Along with the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary, the Press, as the Fourth Estate, should be the watchdog over the functioning of the Government and an ever vigilant guardian of the legitimate rights of the people. A responsive Press committed to the principles of democracy and an egalitarian society should involve the people in the process of the socio-economic transformation of the country. It is among the responsibilities of the Press to help in creating conditions for opening the pathways to change in various spheres of national life.

Essentially, this responsibility is one of creating awareness among the people about various national issues and problems like poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, unemployment, lack of hygiene, environmental degradation, pollution, small family norms, etc. A vibrant Press can contribute substantially in bringing about an informed population, which, to my mind, is one of the greatest assets in a democracy.

Today, we are trying to bring about qualitative changes in the lives of our people and striving to transform our society into a modern and dynamic one. I would expect of the representatives of the media to contribute purposively in this process through their writings and strive to build an India, in which all sections of the society are involved and in the process, empowering our people, socially, economically and politically.

The concept of informed democracy has added significance for a country like India with its many diversities. The Indian nation thrives on its diversity — social, religious, linguistic, political and the like. More than even before, there is an imperative to strengthen our national fabric and the ideals we cherish like democracy, secularism, pluralism, etc. In this onerous task, an alert and vigilant Press must make meaningful contributions. The right to know, which we all talk about, derives its inspiration and sustenance from the Press. It is incumbent upon the media to nurture and promote an informed democracy wherein transparency, accountability and all other components of good governance will prevail. Unfortunately, we find a tendency among a section of the media to project partisan points of view in the name of dissemination of news, which should be wholly factual and objective. The glory of the media is in its presentation of the information based on truth. Sadly, this basic duty is forgotten by some sections of the Press.

Friends, India has emerged during the last five decades as the largest working democracy in the world. When our Constitution-makers provided for a comprehensive list of Fundamental Rights which included the all important right to *'Freedom of Speech and Expression'*, they were, in fact, laying down the foundation for the freedom of the Press in the country. We have to cherish that freedom and should fight against interference with it as also against its aberrations.

Similarly, when our Founding Fathers, established the other vital institutions of democracy, there was a well-thought out scheme behind them, which postulates that no one crosses the *Lakshman Rekha*, as laid down in the Constitution. The Press also has a vital role to play in sustaining democracy, which gets vibrancy when the working people as well as the vulnerable and deprived sections of the community get their dues, in the realisation of which the media's role is of great importance.

In a country with the kind of diversities that we have, the importance of the regional Press can hardly be over-emphasised. Some of the largest selling newspapers and magazines in India are in the regional languages. The Telugu Press is no exception. There is no doubt that the language Press can act as a catalyst for the progress and prosperity of the masses and give a definitive direction to the onward march of our country.

I always identify journalism as a great mission, and not merely as a profession. It is a mission to uphold and promote certain cherished values and lofty ideals. Such a noble mission calls for commitment, courage and conviction, as exemplified by the founders of *Praja Shakti*. For them, it was not an industry, and the newspaper not a product, dictated by the market forces. Through *Praja Shakti*, they sought to educate the masses of their rights and responsibilities, of the issues before the nation and society, of certain values and principles, and also of the eternal values of Communist and Left Movement. I am indeed happy that their mission has been in the best traditions of journalistic ethics as well as of their political ideology.

You have rightly decided to name this building after Comrade M. Hanumantha Rao, a leading political figure of the State, who was also our distinguished colleague in Parliament and the long-time Editor of this prestigious newspaper. I am given to understand that a people's poly-clinic will also be housed within this complex. The whole idea of a people's hospital is something unique and, I would say, worthy of emulation by the whole country, especially for areas not having the benefit of modern medical facilities.

I am sure that *Praja Shakti* will continue to articulate the urges and aspirations of the masses and carry forward the torch of truth and justice and will fight against distortions and aberrations in the society as well as be in

the vanguard of the people's movement for a progressive society ultimately achieving people's democracy. The pioneering role of *Praja Shakti* in tending to our democratic system and public welfare will always be an inspiration to the journalistic fraternity.

I trust that the new building, when commissioned, will have all modern facilities and amenities based on new technologies. I heartily congratulate all of you on this important occasion and wish *Praja Shakti* family the very best. I am confident you will continue to march forward with greater vigour on the path illumined for you by your pioneering leaders.

Thank you.

PARLIAMENT AND THE MEDIA: A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP*

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this Orientation Programme organized by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST) of the Lok Sabha Secretariat. The Bureau, since its inception in 1976, has organized many Orientation and Training Programmes for those associated with the functioning of our parliamentary institutions. I understand that this is the first ever Orientation Programme for members of the media. I wish to congratulate BPST for organizing this Seminar.

Friends, we are all aware that the media is an essential component and an integral part of our parliamentary system; as such, you have a crucial role to play in strengthening our parliamentary edifice. The importance of the Press in covering the proceedings of the representative institution was well realized early in our parliamentary set-up. It was thus that as far back as in 1929, Hon'ble Speaker Vithalbhai Patel constituted a Press Advisory Committee in the Central Legislative Assembly. This Committee has functioned under various nomenclatures assisting the Parliament, successive Presiding Officers and members of the media. In fact, the Committee as well as the media personnel accredited to the Press Galleries have grown with the institution of Parliament.

Over the next three days, you will have an opportunity to interact on various relevant themes with a distinguished faculty from the parliamentary set-up as well as from the media who have rich and varied experience in building an effective relationship between these two vital pillars of our political system. Most of you have been covering Parliament for some time and are familiar with the functional aspects of our Parliament. This Orientation Programme is so scheduled as to provide you a deeper insight into the operational dynamics of our parliamentary system. I am sure this interaction between members of the media who are covering the Parliament and the parliamentary fraternity will be a very productive exercise, benefiting both of them to forge a still closer partnership. We intend to carry forward this dialogue and interaction between media-persons and the parliamentarians in a more meaningful way.

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* At the inauguration of the Orientation Programme for the Media Persons accredited to the Press Galleries of Parliament, organized by the BPST, New Delhi (25 April 2005).

Friends, it is stating the obvious that the media is one of the crucial pillars of democracy. It has rightly been described as the Fourth Estate, the other three being the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. In the words of the eminent jurist Nani Palkhivala: 'To talk of a democracy without a free press is a contradiction in terms. A free press is not an optional extra in a democracy.' In a country like India, where we have a parliamentary form of Government, it is the media which is expected to convey to the people what is happening in Parliament and other representative bodies. Also, it is through the media that the Parliament and the State Legislatures can enjoy the much needed publicity and gather information which helps them to keep surveillance over the Executive in an effective manner.

On its part, media can perform its varied roles efficiently and effectively only if it enjoys freedom of expression. We must keep in mind that freedom is never absolute and it carries with it certain responsibilities and obligations. Even under our Constitution, freedom of speech is subject to reasonable restrictions. This constitutes an important element in the media-Legislature relations. The freedom of the Press is inherent in the Fundamental Right to freedom of speech guaranteed under article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. Similarly, article 105 gives constitutional protection to freedom of speech in Parliament. The Parliament itself has enacted the Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Act, 1977, providing the privilege of publishing substantially true proceedings in Parliament without being exposed to any civil or criminal action.

Our Parliament has all through endeavoured to provide adequate facilities to the media to cover Parliament with the express purpose of bringing the supreme legislative institution nearer to the people. Convinced that communicating Parliament is an imperative to the health and well-being of our parliamentary polity, we have, in December 2004, started two separate channels for the live telecast of the proceedings of the two Houses.

Our Parliament represents over a billion people and is the living symbol of the largest democracy in the world. If people have to sustain their trust and faith in Parliament and parliamentary democracy, it is essential that the institution is brought nearer to the people and the prestige of Parliament is maintained at the highest level. The media personnel, especially those covering Parliament, have an onerous duty in this regard. I agree that, at times, parliamentary proceedings are marred by adjournments and even unruly scenes. I also agree that the media has a right as well as a responsibility to report these developments. At the same time, it is also a fact that parliamentary proceedings are not all about adjournments and acrimony. You are also aware that substantial work is done by members on most days.

There is a perception in parliamentary circles that often the media only highlights the disorderly scenes, leaving out the good work done in the Chambers. We are making every effort to address the problems, and the results have been positive. We need the cooperation of the media also in this regard. I believe all of you will agree that, if Parliament and its members are constantly portrayed in a negative light, it will harm not just the individuals and the institution but parliamentary democracy itself. The public cynicism surrounding politicians and the political establishment, if permitted to grow unchecked, can undermine our parliamentary edifice and all that we have built up over the last five decades. The media should be critical of the negative aspects of our parliamentary or political system; in fact, it should highlight their failings and failures. But I would appeal to all to please consider whether sensationalisation of the proceedings or part thereof in a manner, which only emphasizes what are described as the negative aspects of our parliamentary functioning will not be detrimental to the system as a whole. It would strengthen our commitment to parliamentary democracy if the media also adequately highlights the substantial good work that is being done in Parliament.

I am of the view that the Parliament and the media must respect each other and develop a healthy and cooperative working relationship. I recall that in February 2000, the Indian Parliament had hosted a Conference organized by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association on 'Parliament and the Media: Building an Effective Relationship'. The Conference called upon the parliamentarians and the media to avoid conducting relations with each other in an adversarial manner. While the parliamentarians were requested to respect the media as a legitimate reflection of public opinion, public concerns and social problems and reactions to policies and performances, the media was urged to gain a comprehensive knowledge of, and respect for, the role and position of Parliament and parliamentarians and to provide fair and factually accurate coverage of Parliaments as the duly elected voice of the people. In today's information-driven society, the media is the effective interface among and between the People, Parliament and the Administration. That being so, the Parliament and the media should complement and supplement each other in strengthening our constitutional set up as also in facilitating the emergence of an informed democracy in the country. I am sure in the days ahead, the relationship between the Parliament and the media will be further strengthened with effective co-operative functioning.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating this Orientation Programme. I am sure, it will be a rewarding experience for all the participants.

Thank you.

COURTS, LEGISLATURES AND FREEDOM OF MEDIA*

It is indeed an honour for me to have been asked by Prof. Bipan Chandra to release the volume, *Courts Legislatures Media Freedom*, which has been published by the National Book Trust of India, of which he is now the distinguished Chairman. Under his leadership and guidance, the Book Trust has been making significant contributions in publishing books and treatises on different important aspects of our national life by which the country as a whole is enriched.

The volume which is being released today contains articles of some of the best known authorities, like leading lawyers, academicians as well as media persons and it will, no doubt, be an important addition to the literature on the subject dealing with issues which often agitate the peoples' mind, particularly that of the lawyers, legislators and of the representatives of the media. The contributions deal with the laws relating to the contempt of Court, the privileges of the Legislatures and the freedom of the Press in their different perspectives having a wide socio-political dimension.

Freedom of the Press as part of the Fundamental Right of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by our Constitution is an integral part of our legal and political system, but as per the Constitution, it is subject to reasonable restrictions. The media, which is rightly described as the Fourth Estate, especially in a democratic polity, plays and has to play the extremely important role of dissemination of information, which should be strictly based on truth and objectivity. The right to make *bona fide* criticism of the Executive, the Legislature and even of the Judiciary, is within the permissible limits of the media's functioning. But, of course, as our Constitution itself provides, the freedom of press has to be exercised, in a manner and consistent with, amongst others, the security of the State, public order, decency or morality and should steer clear of committing contempt of Court, defamation or incitement to an offence. These and other provisions of the Constitution lay down the parameters of the media's right to freedom.

Similarly, the Legislature has been assigned even more important roles, which no other authority can discharge. It has the sole right to make laws

* At the release of the book *Courts, Legislatures, Media Freedom*, New Delhi (16 May 2006).

consistent with (if we ignore some of the aberrations) the interest of the people and to fulfil their urges and aspirations, which are articulated through the exercise of their franchise and by several other methods and enforce accountability of the Government in the discharge of its executive functions. It is well-known that because of the primacy of the provisions of the Constitution and particularly of Part-III of the Constitution, validity of the laws can be determined by the Judiciary which can also set aside any executive action taken by the Government, if the same impinges on any law or provision of the Constitution, without of course discharging on its own any executive function. The right to make laws is solely conferred on the Legislatures and other subordinate authorities with the consent of the Legislature. Thus, Legislatures, in their own sphere, as per the Constitution itself, have plenary powers and no other authority can encroach on the same. Obviously, in a polity governed by Rule of Law, the Judiciary occupies a unique position, though of coordinate authority.

The doctrine of 'Separation of Powers' is one of the basic features of our Constitution which very elaborately and judiciously lays down the areas of functioning of the different authorities namely, the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive. For a parliamentary democracy to operate successfully, and as our Founding Fathers laid down in the Constitution, all the organs are obviously required to follow the basic principles of the doctrine. Our Constitution does not contemplate a super organ a superior organ.

It is not proper to talk of freedom of the different organs only but what is most important is the 'freedom' of the people of this country — their freedom to live with dignity, freedom to have a civilized existence, freedom to obtain education, health-care, employment and other necessities of life. It seems that some of the State organs are more concerned with their own 'freedoms' than with the freedom of the people as a whole. It cannot be denied that there are still unfortunately large areas of privation and misery amongst the people with pockets of affluence and almost monopolistic enjoyment of the facilities and resources by a handful minority.

I do not find any reason why for the purpose of exercising their own freedom as contemplated by our Constitution, there should be any tension and disharmony among the different organs. Belonging to the different organs, we should ask ourselves whether all of us are doing our respective duties in a manner, which the Constitution requires us to do for the teeming millions of the country and whether there is a need for introspection. We have a country with tremendous resources and potential but with serious problems also. Unless all the organs of the State, together with the media, work in unison, what will be the future of the country and how will we all serve the people? In my opinion, if we stress on the issues of unity than of disunity,

if all of us do our respective duties as the Constitution-makers have contemplated and if there is goodwill and accommodation, we certainly can steer clear of many contentious issues and problems.

Everyone will accept that the media should have the freedom to act in the discharge of its functions. My friends in the media will, no doubt, agree that the dissemination of information must be factual and objective and there should not be any attempt to project one's own views as news. Newspapers through articles and editorials can surely articulate their views and make comments on the state of affairs in the country and one should concede the right of the media to project its views without restrictions, subject of course to legal and constitutional limitations. The question arises as to what extent such power can be interfered with by other authorities like the Judiciary and the Legislature.

Unfortunately, to my mind, and I hope I am wrong that what is seen these days is some amount of competitive journalism, both in the print and the electronic media — sensationalism, lack of due concern for objectivity and presentation of views in the garb of news — are in a way, eroding the peoples' faith in sections of the Fourth Estate. We take pride that ours is the largest democracy in the world. But how much space is being provided for parliamentary proceedings except, of course, headlines when there are some unfortunate disruptions. The Parliament of India, which is the most important elected body in the country and the only organ of the State, which is directly constituted by the people themselves, hardly find ample media coverage. It has become a practice, if not fashion, in many quarters to abuse the legislators for their supposed failure to do their duty and to support such contentions, to indulge in invectives and abuse, if not deliberate distortion of events. Fortunately, these are rare instances and during the last two years, there has been only one occasion when a newspaper, to my mind, deliberately spread canards against the Presiding Officer, for which no action was taken except issuing a warning. I firmly believe media should and does enjoy the highest freedom, *vis-a-vis* the Legislatures in this country, subject of course to some very unfortunate exceptions. Such cases, I hope, will not recur in future, but what is needed is a commitment to resolve the questions with goodwill and respect for each other.

Unfortunately, if I am not misunderstood by my friends in the media, that in the era of globalisation and market-driven economy, in many instances, journalistic ethics is being decided by market as has been mentioned by one of the contributors. I am not referring to the ownership of the newspaper as such but now-a-days one knows generally which paper is supporting which political party. With some honourable exceptions, large sections of the media are aligning themselves with one political formulation or the other, thereby affecting their overall objectivity and credibility.

What is to be assured is that nothing should be said or done *mala fide* which affects the very institutions themselves. If uninformed publications and motivated criticism affects the functioning of the Legislature and create doubts and questions in the people's mind about the efficacy of the Legislature's work, then I feel great injustice is or will be done to the functioning of one of the most important organs of the State in a parliamentary democracy. What is the alternative to parliamentary democracy in the country? Is there a better system which the country can adopt? I see none. Therefore, it is our duty to see that in our democracy the Parliament's and the Legislatures' role is properly recognized and no attempt should be made with oblique motive to interfere with their discharge of very important and responsible duties. I do not consider that the privileges of the Legislatures (though not yet codified), which are formulated only for the proper functioning of the body, can be treated as a weapon that, as the Editor describes, 'the adversaries of the Press have in their armoury'. There is no reason for any conflict between the discharge of the functions by the media and the Legislature, and obviously, if we do not encroach upon each other's territory, there will be harmonious relationship.

Recently, on the basis of some disclosures in the media, very stringent action has been taken by the Parliament of India, even to the extent of expulsion of members. It shows the Legislature takes note of the positive role of the media and nobody, except those former members themselves, has questioned the action that has been taken. There are some discordant notes, no doubt that media is indulging in witch-hunting or character assassination but I firmly believe that those who have taken upon themselves public duties to perform should behave in an exemplary manner and there should not be any occasion even for any revelation or disclosures as has happened in recent instances. The Parliament always tries its best and some time acts out of its way to provide facilities and resources for the friends in the media to perform their duties adequately. With the proliferation of the media and the newer and newer publications and opening up of more and more TV channels, obviously, such facilities as are necessary may not be given in spite of our best wishes, but there has been no occasion recently or in the past of there being any adversarial attitude towards the media.

In the context of the various contempt proceedings against the Press, pertinent questions are being posed by Prof. Bipin Chandra in his volume: Will the Judiciary be successful in curbing the Press and harnessing it to its agenda? or, Will the Press resist and fight to preserve its hard-won freedom and independence? His view is that in order to preserve its independence, the Press has to resist the politicians in power and in the Legislatures and the bureaucracy, on the one hand, and the Judiciary on the other. I would add to it that for preserving the Press freedom, more than anything else, it has to

guard against its own proclivity to be subjective at times in discharging its own perceived role in a democracy. The freedom of the Press is not to be construed as the freedom for a market-driven competition for space and sensationalism. The Editor's view that 'the support the Press has given to the Judiciary before and during its activist role is probably reflective of the essentially urban middle and upper propertied class-character of its professionals, ownership and readership', is worthy of note. The contours of democracy, obviously, cannot be limited to the views and perceptions of these classes alone.

The much-maligned politician and the people's representatives have to be sensitive to the perceptions of the less privileged and the common man whose concerns often do not find adequate space in the media or in the reckoning of the Judiciary. Their concerns may not always be in conformity with the urban middle class notions of law, legitimacy, freedom, duties, etc. Of course, a socially sensitive judge and journalist will not overlook them. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer's reactions to the Bombay High Court Order of 7 May 1997, on a so-called 'Public Interest Litigation', to evict a large number of helpless slum-dwellers from public property, that 'only judicial field-marshals, with military flair and militant mood, can conceive of such *in terrorem* commands...', was reflective of such uncommon sensitivity displayed by those associated with the Judiciary. His views on contempt jurisdiction, quoted by one of the contributors to this volume and his warning against the tendency to equate public interest with the interest of the class to which the judges themselves belong, deserve our serious attention.

By highlighting the genuine concerns and a cross-current of views of those associated with the different organs of democracy, the contributors to the volume have brought into focus some of the major issues of democratic discourse in the country today. The Editor's observation that the Judiciary, while arrogating to itself certain powers which were otherwise being exercised by the Executive, chose to be silent about the opportunities for post-retirement appointments for the Judges, conveys a subtle message to the reader about the possibilities for patronage still available and being looked forward to by the interested persons.

There may be honest differences of opinion on some of the issues highlighted in the book. One contributor has observed that 'the power and trust reposed in the Judiciary by the Constitution unarguably reveals the primacy of the Judiciary in the constitutional framework'. To my mind, it is not necessary to speak of any organ's superiority over another, which will be essentially a contentious notion. Even a careful reading of the Constitution will not support such a contention.

A perusal of the provisions of our Constitution, dealing particularly with the Union Judiciary, will clearly show that what is provided for is a close relationship between the Judiciary and the Legislature not in a manner of controlling each other but of a mutually complementary working relationship which should necessarily be based on harmony between the two most important organs of the State. Articles 124 to 142, in different ways, give a pre-eminent role to the Parliament *vis-a-vis* the Judiciary. It is the Parliament that is invested with the power to confer by law ancillary powers, not inconsistent with any of the provisions of the Constitution, upon the Supreme Court as may appear to be necessary or desirable for the purpose of enabling the Court more effectively to exercise the jurisdiction conferred upon it by or under the Constitution which shows the source of power is only the Parliament. 'Laws' in this context do not contemplate what are described as judge-made laws.

Our Constitution does not contemplate nor provides for the use of court's power to execute its orders by use of 'jurisdiction *in terrorem*', namely, the power to punish for 'contempt of court'. Article 142(2) provides that the Supreme Court's power *inter alia* of punishment of any contempt of itself shall be subject to the provision of any law made in this behalf by the Parliament. The Constitution does not contemplate of any area of confrontation or even of non-cooperation. It clearly provides for different spheres of jurisdiction for the different organs of the State and, at the same time, visualizes all the three organs to work as co-ordinate partners rather than as competing centres of power. The supremacy of the law of Parliament in certain respects, so far as the Judiciary is concerned, establishes the primacy of Parliament constituted of the elected representatives of the people and not of the Judiciary.

As Shri Rajeev Dhawan observes, the contempt law should not be interpreted as giving some absolute powers to the 'Judiciary, especially the highest Judiciary'. The whole idea of absolute power and resort to *in terrorem* commands, to my mind, is against the spirit of democracy. No authority, in a democracy, is above the Constitution, which derives its powers from the people. The view that the use of contempt law to suppress *bona fide* public criticism can only become counter-productive and that the law itself should be re-interpreted keeping in mind the modern context, merits the attention of all concerned.

I do not deny that there are occasions when overzealous guardians of the legislative privileges ignore norms of restraints. But, a close scrutiny of the instances of invocation of legislative privileges against the citizens in general and the Press in particular, will reveal that the Legislatures, particularly the Parliament, has consistently shown the utmost restraint in dealing with perceived instances of breach of legislative privilege. It is, nevertheless,

important for the Judiciary and the Press to bear in mind that only in a democratic system do these organs flourish or co-exist and otherwise they fade into insignificance before an overbearing Executive. The first pillar of modern democracy, undoubtedly, is the Legislature itself. One of the greatest strengths of democracy is that it is a system of alternatives, sustained exclusively by the trust and confidence of the people, and as such, responsible and accountable to them. Representation and accountability are at the core of democracy. If we give these principles a go by, we will be advocating rule by institutions which are fundamentally unaccountable.

It is from the attributes of representation that the concept of parliamentary privilege emerges — that since the members of Parliament represent the majesty of the people in a democracy and their interests, it is necessary to protect or insulate their position in a manner befitting their role, position and the nature of responsibilities expected of them, from intrusive or obtrusive behaviour by any one else. These privileges and the respect an MP commands are not in his individual capacity, but a recognition of the importance of the concept of representation in a democracy.

The view put forth by one of the contributors that for the system of mutual checks and balances as envisaged in our Constitution and the political system to work, all the institutions involved — the Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary and the Media — need to have equal respect for one another, and that is most desirable for strengthening our polity. No organ should go overboard on issues that are more effectively discharged by other organs and are also specifically assigned to them by the Constitution. There should be no assumption that any particular organ has a monopoly of concern for the people. In fact, some of the articulate critics of rule by the Judiciary are none other than some of the most outstanding Jurists of our country who have seen through these finer points.

As Hon'ble Justice Srikrishna of the Supreme Court recently stated: 'In the name of judicial activism, modern day Judges in India have abandoned the traditional role of a neutral referee and have increasingly resorted to tipping the scales of justice in the name of *distributive justice*. The legitimacy of such actions needs critical appraisement at the hands of the legal fraternity'. As he further elaborates, '*Political questions* which were meant to be out-of-bounds for the courts have often been thrown into the laps of Judges. Instead of throwing them back, the courts have, with great enthusiasm, essayed into adjudication of such questions, often with unsatisfactory results'.

The political questions and issues of policy are matters which come under the domain of the Legislature and the Executive. It is time we agreed with learned jurists like Justice Srikrishna and recognized that 'the answers to many socio-economic and political problems lie with Parliament and in a

polling booth and not in a courtroom,' and that such activism 'strains the institutional resources of the court; it also diverts the time, talent and energy of Judges into channels that they are neither required to navigate, nor equipped to, for lack of competence, skill or resources'.

Hon'ble Justice Markanday Katju's recent observations, while hearing a matter before the Supreme Court, also merits mention here: 'I do not subscribe to the view that Judiciary should be seen as running the Government. Everything is being raised through PILs. The Judiciary must know its limits, otherwise there would be a reaction' and that 'it has become a fashion to file PILs raising almost all matters before the court which normally fall within the domain of the Executive'.

The questions raised by the Editor in the introductory Chapter, like: Will the entire concept of balance not be rendered meaningless if one side, however enlightened, is to be given almost complete overriding powers? Will absolute power in this case too fail to corrupt absolutely? Will the resulting hubris not result inevitably in nemesis? Who is to protect anyone if the Judiciary errs or is corrupt or prejudiced or goes too far? To whom does the Press turn if it is under attack from the Judiciary? To whom can the displaced and other victims of development projects turn if they do not find succour in judicial pronouncements? How can they voice their grievances and get the attention and sympathy of the public if their non-violent protests and even mild utterances are treated as contempt of court? In other words, who will provide the check and balance against the Judiciary? These questions, in many ways, bring us back to the fundamental concerns before our representative system. In closer analysis, even the protagonists of judicial activism and rule by Judiciary will have to grudgingly agree that 'democracy is the worst system of Government but for all other systems that have been tested and tried so far'. And the basis of its strength lies in the fact that it is a system that authentically represents the people in and through their representatives in the Legislature.

Thank you.

I deem it an honour to have this opportunity to associate myself with the release of the Commemorative Stamp marking the completion of 125 years of *The Tribune*, which is indeed a significant landmark in any newspaper's journey. Over these years *The Tribune* has been the strident voice of freedom, democracy, rationality, and a progressive and plural society where news is not coloured by views. I take this opportunity to compliment all those who have been associated with this leading Daily, with a large and dedicated readership.

The history of the evolution of *The Tribune* is very closely interwoven with the history of our freedom movement since the late nineteenth century and the emergence of India as a free, strong, progressive and forward looking country in the twentieth century. Launched by the visionary, Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, at a crucial juncture of the country's history, with a commitment to work for people's welfare, to articulate public opinion and to advocate the cause of the masses, this prestigious newspaper with its roots in Punjab, has earned name and fame over the years and has come to be identified as one committed to journalistic ethics, professionalism and to safeguarding the larger national values. During the freedom struggle, *The Tribune* helped to spread the impulse of national awakening and played an important role in sustaining the spirit of the freedom movement, particularly in Punjab. In those tumultuous years, *The Tribune* remained part of the nationalist Press, supporting the cause of India's Independence. In the post-Independence years, this staunch nationalist newspaper continued, with renewed vigour and zeal, its campaign to free the country of narrow and parochial interests based on religion, caste, language and region and to promote the values of pluralism and co-existence.

In its long journey of 125 years, *The Tribune*, as the mouthpiece of the people, has been served by some of the great names in Indian journalism. Beginning with Bipin Chandra Pal, the famous nationalist leader, this newspaper has had the fortune of having eminent Editors like Shri Kalinath Ray, Shri Hari Jai Singh and currently Shri H.K. Dua. Each one of them has left his indelible imprint on this prestigious daily. *The Tribune*, can legitimately

* While releasing the Commemorative Stamp to mark the completion of 125 years of *The Tribune*, New Delhi (24 November 2006).

take pride in its own contributions towards the consolidation and strengthening of democracy in the country.

Media plays a crucial role in a democratic society as a creator of public opinion, a watch-dog, an educator and, above all, as a facilitator of an informed democracy. In an increasingly information-driven world order, it is through the media that the functioning of our democratic institutions receives public attention. Apart from informing and educating the people about various issues of contemporary relevance, a free and unfettered media acts as a bulwark against arbitrary governance. While playing an important role in helping to sustain people's respect for democratic institutions, the Press has to maintain high standards of professional rectitude, exercising its freedom with a certain degree of caution and responsibility.

Parliament and the media, to my mind, share a special relationship. Both, in fact, nurture a common constituency, that is, the people. The media has to act as a forum to give voice to people's aspirations and desires and undertake the duty of providing information to the parliamentarians about the conditions in the country and conversely report to people about the role, relevance and functioning of the institutions of democracy. To discharge this duty effectively the media has to be committed to the system rather than to short-term commercial gains and sensationalism.

Our Parliament, representing over a billion people, is a living symbol of the vitality and resilience of the largest democracy in the world. There is no doubt that at times, parliamentary proceedings are unfortunately marred by adjournments and even unruly and uproarious scenes, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that parliamentary proceedings are not only about adjournments, indiscipline and acrimony. Substantial work of far-reaching significance is also done by the members in Parliament through the Committees and in their constituencies. It is, therefore, important that the good work that the Parliament and its Committees are doing in keeping the Government accountable, and in enacting pro-people legislations and debating important topics, are also highlighted adequately to help build people's trust in their representative institutions and to strengthen the edifice of democracy. It is of the utmost importance that the productive work of our Parliament is adequately highlighted by the media so that the public perception of our Parliament and parliamentarians can be based on an overall assessment of parliamentary proceedings.

The media has every right to criticise the shortcomings of our parliamentary or political system; in fact, they should spare no effort in exposing the inadequacies which will help the institution and the participants to get over them, at the same time duly recognising the effective participation of many of the members.

During the Monsoon Session of our Parliament, unable to comprehend the logic of preference for disruption over an opportunity to put across genuine and popular public issues before Parliament through structured debate and discussions which would require the Government to make its response on the floor of the House, I asked some leaders about the efficacy of that approach. Their response was that such disruptions were politically more productive as they get greater publicity than the debates which are very inadequately noticed by the media. In this context, my earnest request to the media is to consider how, as a very important institution in a parliamentary democracy, it can strengthen our constitutional framework by generating people's faith in the system, inviting their participation in the process to remove the aberrations and imperfections that have crept in. I am sure, my friends in the media will help in finding out appropriate solution to this important matter.

Of course, our Parliament itself has to be ever alert about the criticism and the growing cynicism among our people about the way our institutions of democracy function. It is on the members of Parliament that the responsibility for sustaining people's faith in democracy as the most sensitive system to the people's problems, no doubt, rests. Therefore, the institution collectively and the individual members, who constitute it, will have to function as role models for the society at large.

In a society like ours, where diverse religious, linguistic, cultural and regional groups coexist, it is important that the Press plays a balancing act, keeping the larger national interest in mind. A responsible Press has to respond against wrongs and injustices of all kind. What the people are interested is to get is indeed news, which should not be coloured by the views of those controlling the paper, which can be expressed in the editorials or as comments. The media is indeed a powerful factor in bringing about positive change in society by highlighting the neglected issues and by giving voice to the voiceless, the vulnerable, the forgotten, and the downtrodden.

I am happy to note that newspapers like *The Tribune* shoulder their responsibility with professional concern and abiding commitment. I once again congratulate *The Tribune* family for acting untiringly as an agent of mass communication and political socialisation, as a forum for public debate, as a watchdog of people's interests and as a protector of the highest standards of professional ethics. I am sure, *The Tribune* will continue to serve the nation with its meaningful and people-centric reporting. I also compliment the Department of Posts for bringing out this Commemorative Postal Stamp to mark the completion of 125 years of this prestigious newspaper. With these words, I have great pleasure in releasing the Commemorative Stamp.

Thank you.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS—EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM*

I am extremely pleased to be here on this occasion when we are acknowledging 'Excellence in Journalism.' I am thankful to the International Press Institute, India Chapter, for giving me the honour to present the IPI–India Award for Excellence in Journalism 2006. May I take this opportunity to heartily congratulate *The Indian Express* on being chosen to receive this prestigious Award for the second time. I also compliment the India Chapter of the IPI on instituting this Award for recognising the best work done by a news organisation or a journalist in furtherance of public interest, including the protection of citizens' rights.

The Indian Express needs no introduction. It has been for a long time an important part of our national life. The Award speaks of the high standing and impeccable credentials of the paper which has earned recognition due to the dedication, commitment and integrity of a large number of men and women who have toiled to make *The Indian Express* what it is today. The Late Ram Nath Goenka once said that 'Truth, knowledge, impartial and accurate information are instruments of empowerment'. The newspaper's proactive campaign on a host of issues of national concern and on the ills afflicting our society has indeed been acclaimed by the nation as a whole. The IPI-India Award has been given this time, for the reports on the Bihar flood scam and the missing tigers in our wildlife sanctuaries. I compliment the management, Shri Shekhar Gupta, the Editor and the staff of *The Indian Express* on making the newspaper indeed a symbol of "journalism of courage".

The India Chapter of the International Press Institute is doing a major service to the media by its varied activities and by its efforts to safeguard the freedom of the Press. I commend the IPI as also its India Chapter for their eternal vigilance in the cause of journalism, freedom of speech and expression, and more importantly democracy.

Friends, in a political system that guarantees to its citizens freedom of speech and expression, the media plays a very important role by promoting democratic values in society, and waging crusade against all aberrations and

* At the function to present the IPI-India Award for Excellence in Journalism, 2006, New Delhi (8 December 2006).

imperfections in the polity. To quote the Nobel laureate Prof. Amartya Sen: 'The absence of a free Press and the suppression of people's ability to communicate with each other have the effect of directly reducing the quality of human life... '.

The media has a crucial role in strengthening the edifice of democracy and in ensuring good governance, which holds the key to the development of the nation. It speaks volumes of our democracy that the Press, as *The Indian Express* has time and again shown, is playing a significant role in ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making processes. We need more and more journalists like Verghese K. George and Jay Majumdar, devoted to public good, who are courageous and public-spirited and ready to take on even the most powerful by exposing corruption, official insensitivity and apathy as also misgovernance.

The Press rightly enjoys considerable power in playing the role of a watchdog over the Government and the corporate world, in influencing decisions and setting trends, transmitting ideas and information and giving voice to the poor and the deprived. At the same time, the Press has to see that it exercises its power for the ultimate good of the society and not out of any personal vendetta. We want, our Press to be fearless and unbiased, and at the same time, should abjure mere sensationalism and projections based on its own predilections.

It is extremely important that the journalist or the Editor does not project the views of his or her own or of the management as news. The views can certainly be expressed in the editorials as well as in the signed articles. In the media, as indeed in any aspect of human life, the truth should never be compromised nor should anybody indulge in half-truths, which will negate the ennobling principles which media is expected to follow.

The success of our parliamentary system depends, to a large extent, on the role of the media in serving as an interface between the Parliament and the people. It will serve our democracy well if the issues discussed in Parliament are provided important and adequate coverage. The media, by all means, should expose the misdeeds of those who deal with public affairs including the people's representatives, but, if I may submit, it should also report as well many commendable work done or initiatives taken. There is considerable work done in the Parliament and its Committees and the public are entitled to know of them.

Parliament has been one of the most harmonising institutions in the country and it believes in a healthy relationship with the other organs of State. It does not help our polity if an impression is created that Parliament is at odds with any other organ of State. I was surprised when some sections

of the media wrote that Parliament was waiting for a confrontation with the Judiciary or that I had fired the opening salvo against it. Democracy is not a war, but is a well thought out system where institutions have to work together to take the country forward. As the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, it has been my conviction and endeavour that all organs of State should work harmoniously within the parameters prescribed by the Constitution.

Parliament, to my mind, can fail for two reasons. One is for parliamentarians to forsake their roles and use the institution for petty political purposes. Second is for the citizens to lose interest in the institutions and get a feeling that the Parliament does not matter in their lives. Parliament has performed its functions conscientiously. It has not only widened and deepened the Rule of Law by a network of key legislations in all areas, Parliament has served the national interest by holding the other institutions accountable to it and by keeping a watch over the functioning of every other institution of our democracy. We should not allow anything which would make our citizens become cynical and lose interest in the democratic process, at the heart of which stands the Parliament. This is the message I have been humbly trying to convey during my meetings with larger audiences in all parts of the country and I seek the cooperation of the media, in this onerous task. We must remember that a free media is one of the greatest offshoots of democracy — they survive together or collapse together.

As a parliamentarian, I have applauded the media for its role in exposing the malfeasance and corruption in our public activities. In Parliament, we have taken action whenever misdeeds of our members were exposed by the media. Long ago, Mahatma Gandhi had given the prescription for a newspaper: 'One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand the popular feelings and give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments; and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects'.

The media's responsibility should not end with mere criticism of the aberrations and pitfalls in the system of which the media itself is an essential component. The media, the intellectual and the academic community and the enlightened sections of the civil society find faults with the functioning of the political and the social systems but shy away from intervening pro-actively in addressing the imperfections. Are we helping to correct such imperfections when irresponsible conduct by individuals and groups, who are otherwise part of one institution or the other, are projected as reflections on the decay of the institution they are associated with? Can we help in promoting national unity and integrity without targeting those who promote, directly or indirectly, divisiveness in society? Can we bring about social and economic equity without promoting inclusive policies and politics? A healthy democratic

culture can be brought about only if those who indulge in or abet activities or behaviour incompatible with the established norms are made to account for such conduct individually or as groups, separating them from the institutions they happen to be associated with. An attitude of carpet bombing is not going to help the system.

India functioning under a Parliamentary Democracy is making giant strides for development in various sectors but there are forces trying to thwart the process by weakening the democratic structure itself. Nobody can suggest nor is suggesting any better alternative to Parliamentary Democracy in which the Parliament as an Institution, undoubtedly, occupies the central position. As the representative body of the people, it is the forum which approves the policies and programmes of the government of the day as also where the peoples' issues are debated and discussed to seek solutions. Each and every Member of the House of People represents a sizeable section of the people of the country and the source of authority of the Members is obviously the sanction of the people. To my mind any attempt to denigrate or diminish the importance of Parliament or to stifle its proper functioning is not only an attack on the foundations of our democratic existence but also on our basic Constitutional edifice itself which provides for the people's rights as also the framework for solving the people's problems through the Parliamentary processes.

Undoubtedly, it is the primary duty of the Legislators themselves to sustain the dignity and image of the Parliament, but in my humble view, that responsibility does not rest exclusively on the Legislators alone. When the Legislators do not function in a manner expected of them, the blame for the consequent decline in public esteem of the Parliament rests on the members themselves. But when there is a deliberate attempt to denigrate the Parliament and the Parliamentary System of governance by forces inimical to the system, then I believe it is the collective responsibility of the society, more specially of the media, which is rightly treated as the Fourth Estate, to seek to isolate those who do so. As I have said, if there is no democracy, there will be no Freedom of the Press. Therefore, it is the vested interest of the media also to see that the Parliament and the Parliamentary System flourish in a manner which, while sustaining people's faith in the system, maintains and enhances the dignity of the Parliament. In fact, every limb of our democratic structure must recognise that the most important imponderable that goes into the sustenance of democracy is the people's faith in its institutions. Preservation of the image and identity of the institutions should become a core concern for all institutions of democracy.

Unfortunately, our polity today is overtaken by extremely partisan and confrontational politics. There appears to be an atmosphere of intolerance, if

not hatred, to each other, which is substantially affecting the political morality of our country. My appeal to the distinguished and well-meaning friends in the media is that they have to very seriously ponder over and see whether they have any role in isolating the forces of disruption and divisiveness and to consider how to do it. In my very humble opinion, so long as the detractors feel that their disruptive activities receive greater media attention than the discharge of duties in a normal and constructive way, then it will only help to encourage those who should otherwise be isolated. I often get an impression that many actions in our political functioning today are influenced by the perceived importance given by the media. Recently, I was told by one of the prominent leaders that disruption of the proceedings of the House are politically more rewarding than a structured debate in the House because while such disruptions get the headlines, the debate, if at all reported, is in the inner pages and that too, not prominently.

I hope I shall not be misunderstood, I am wholly convinced of the great role which is being played by the media in our country. The tradition has been carried forward from the days of our freedom struggle and, in a large measure, it is being followed today into the seventh decade of our freedom, and we are genuinely proud of its achievements and sense of duty to the nation. I hope my humble views will be treated in the spirit in which they have been made.

We have gathered here this evening, to honour not only two individuals who discharged their professional responsibilities in a remarkable manner, but also to honour the institution they represent for discharging its primary social responsibility in a commendable manner. The three stories which earned the Indian Express this coveted Award, have sought to convey – larger social message of corruption of different kinds - that have the potential to undermine our democracy if correctives are not applied with all seriousness by all sections of our society. Each of those stories reflects the cancer getting embedded into our socio-political system. *The Indian Express*, through those courageous reporters, has demonstrated an exemplary sense of social responsibility in presenting the stories before the country.

What has impressed me the most in the Award winning report is the sustained investigation carried out by the newspaper's reporter which ensured that there was no consequential cover up. Thus the public was informed of the developments in the scam investigation, and the pressure was on the establishment to ensure that the scam was not brushed under the carpet. Similarly, *The Indian Express* has done great service by focussing on the vanishing tiger in one of our most important wildlife sanctuaries. I am sure Mr. Shekhar Gupta and his team would continue with their good work in the years ahead.

Everyone will agree with the International Press Institute's principle that freedom of expression is the right that protects all other rights and that this freedom needs to be promoted and defended. Let us work together and meaningfully use the freedom of speech and expression for the deepening of our democratic ethos and for the advancement of the people and the country as *The Indian Express* has been striving all through.

I once again congratulate *The Indian Express* for receiving the IPI-India Award for Excellence in Journalism, 2006. I would also compliment the IPI-India Chapter on instituting this prestigious Award to promote journalistic excellence. With these words, I have great pleasure in presenting this Award of the IPI-India Chapter on *The Indian Express* which symbolises the utmost commitment to the lofty values of democracy and the ennobling ideals of journalism of courage.

Thank you.

STRENGTHENING MEDIA CAPACITY IN SAARC COUNTRIES*

I deem it an honor and a privilege to have been invited to inaugurate this two-day Conference of Parliamentarians from SAARC Countries being held under the auspices of the India Chapter of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA). I am happy to have the opportunity to interact with my fellow parliamentarians and the representatives of the Media from the South Asia Region, who have come here to discuss issues that would contribute towards strengthening democracy and for establishing durable peace in the region. I compliment the SAFMA for their laudable efforts in bringing together the parliamentarians of the region with a view to transforming this region into one of peace, tranquility and development.

I wish to compliment SAFMA for having taken the responsibility of strengthening media capacity and promoting access to and free flow of information across the region; defending and expanding Press freedom and engaging main stakeholders in promoting understanding for conflict resolution and regional cooperation through the forum of SAARC. SAFMA's belief in the efficacy of free exchange of information and views, and its objective of bringing a transition from information as power for a few to information as empowerment for many are quite relevant for a region like ours, where substantial sections of the population are yet to get the benefit of today's information and communication revolution. The SAFMA deserves all the credit for successfully organizing the first Conference of parliamentarians held about two years ago in Pakistan which, by all accounts, was a remarkable success in terms of the involvement of parliamentarians from the SAARC countries. It is a commendable achievement that within a short span of seven years SAFMA has been able to establish itself as the largest network of mainstream media practitioners of the South Asian region and has quite appropriately been officially recognized by SAARC as its associate body.

In a democratic set up, the Legislature, being the supreme representative and law-making body, enjoys a pre-eminent position. Parliament seeks to discharge its responsibility by enacting laws, debating important issues facing

* Inaugural Address at the Second Conference of Parliamentarians from SAARC Countries, organized by the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA), Shimla (2 June 2007).

society and holding the administration accountable for all its acts of omission and commission. People look up to their representatives for ventilating their grievances and meeting their aspirations and they expect the parliamentarians to discharge their responsibilities with sincerity and commitment. Parliamentarians enjoy the status of opinion-leaders and opinion-moulders and naturally the people expect them to conduct themselves in such a manner that enhances the prestige of Parliament. Democracy can survive and enjoy legitimacy only when the representative institutions perform well. No Parliament, for that matter, no institution, can perform in adequate measure if its members abandon their primary roles and start using their positions and authority for other purposes.

As the distinguished delegates are aware, our region is one of the poorest in the world and that makes the task of a parliamentarian all the more challenging. It is a matter of grave concern that two-fifth of our fourteen hundred million people are living on less than one dollar a day and our region accounts for 40 per cent of the world's poor while we are home to 23 per cent of the world's population. Problems like illiteracy, lack of education, sanitation and health care, non-accessibility to safe drinking water, trafficking of women and children, environmental degradation, etc. are endemic to our region. Our Governments are still struggling to provide all our people the minimum basic necessities of life. Our decision makers and policy planners have a daunting task to achieve all round development and bring in a regime of growth with equity. This is a formidable challenge for the people and their leadership to face collectively today.

In this context, the SAARC Social Charter represents an important step towards strengthening regional cooperation among the SAARC countries as it provides a roadmap for our respective governments in a number of important areas like poverty alleviation, health, education, women's empowerment, child development and youth mobilization. It is incumbent upon the Governments of SAARC countries to direct their efforts and resources towards achieving the specific objectives highlighted in the Social Charter. We, as people's representatives and law makers, can also contribute significantly by supporting and supplementing the efforts of our governments in actualizing the objectives set out in the Social Charter as also in achieving the SAARC Development Goals and the Millennium Development Goals. I have no doubt in my mind that the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) holds a bright future for our countries and we, as parliamentarians, should ensure that the Agreement is sincerely implemented by our respective governments so that people can enjoy the dividend of increasing regional trade.

Distinguished delegates, there is a symbiotic relationship between democracy, peace and development. A free media plays a crucial role in strengthening this relationship. Media is the effective interface among and between the people, Parliament and the administration. Today, when there is rightly emphasis on accountability, transparency and good governance, the role of the media becomes all the more important. The onset of the electronic and on-line media has made its reach truly global and indeed instant, thereby eliminating geographical barriers. In an environment that guarantees freedom of speech and expression, the media has become a potent force in promoting democratic values and in waging a sustained campaign against corrupt practices and negligence of both the state and non-state actors.

That being so, Parliament and the media should complement each other in strengthening the edifice of democracy as also in facilitating the emergence of an informed democracy in our region. Parliament is not to be seen in isolation from the people whom it represents, it is and must be seen as a body of people's representatives with the mandate to work both inside and outside the legislative body for articulating and fulfilling the aspirations and expectations of the people.

The media, no doubt, has a right and indeed it is its duty to expose the public authorities, including parliamentarians, who indulge in unethical and corrupt practices. Maintaining a balance in this, keeping the larger health of the system in mind, is a delicate task which only a responsible press committed to the system rather than to short-term commercial gains and sensationalism can discharge effectively.

If the democratic institutions or their great symbols are undermined before the people no one will be able to guard them against public apathy if not antipathy. The most important imponderable that makes or mars democratic societies is the confidence or lack of it about the system among the people. The media has a special responsibility in helping to sustain that confidence not by overlooking the aberrations, but by presenting facts before the people with a sense of objectivity and courage.

Peter R. Kann, a Pultizer prize winning Journalist, in a thought-provoking article, in *The Wall Street Journal* last year, highlighted ten disturbing trends in the contemporary mass media. Four obvious ones among them which all of us here may easily recognize are:

- The blurring of the lines between journalism and entertainment.
- The blurring of lines between news and opinion.
- The exaggerated tendency toward pessimism.
- The growing media fascination with the bizarre, the perverse and the pathological.

To quote him: 'At its best, news informs and enlightens the citizens of a free society and thereby safeguards and strengthens our democracy. At its worst – dishonest, unfair, irresponsible – the media has potential to erode the public trust on which its own success depends and to corrode the democratic system of which it is so indispensably a part'. The importance of his observation that, 'the press is at least partially responsible for greater public scepticism toward traditional institutions ... .', should not be lost sight of.

Today, when democratic institutions in many societies are being faced with a credibility deficit, the media need to ask itself if it is contributing towards enhancing that credibility or is it also, unwittingly, becoming a factor in undermining it. To quote Peter Kann again: '... it's one thing—and an appropriate one—for the press to probe particular instances of political corruption. It's quite another thing to jump to the cynical conclusion that the political process, and all politicians, are corrupted—that *'they all do it.'*

Friends, free flow of information among the SAARC countries for removing the atmosphere of suspicion and misunderstanding among the peoples of the region is of crucial importance today. This can be made possible only when we allow more and more people, including students, teachers, professionals and journalists to visit our respective countries. In this context, you would know that the Indian Government has taken a decision to liberalize the visa regime for students, teachers and journalists with a view to further increasing people-to-people contacts.

The people of the region are now clamouring for peace as they crave for a better standard of living, better health care and school facilities for their children. They are realizing that their well being and security lie not in confrontation or in maintaining an adversarial relationship but in cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Both Parliaments and the media should reflect the aspirations of the people to live in peace and harmony and unitedly make efforts in that direction. We must join hands to neutralize forces inimical to peace and prosperity in our region. Given its wide reach and the speed, media is singularly placed, and I think the media very well realizes this, to bring about a change in the mindset of all those who are not positively inclined towards or are sceptical about the future of regional cooperation in this part of the world.

Even though there are many social and economic ills plaguing our region, our people are our real strength and we need to make use of our human resources and leverage our strengths to put an end to the ills afflicting our societies. The people's representatives need to work hard, increase interaction among themselves and understand each other's perspectives and join hands in trying to provide an enabling condition to our peoples so that they will be

able to contribute to the peace process and also enjoy the benefits of peace and development as equal partners and beneficiaries.

Friends, it is now widely acknowledged that the 21st Century belongs to Asia and it will be an Asian Century. If that were so, it falls upon the people, governments, parliamentarians, the media and the civil society groups of the South Asia region to help shape the Asian Century. We can benefit immensely from our unity of purpose and unity of action.

One hundred and fifty years ago, our forefathers had shown exemplary courage and spirit of co-operation in launching their first major offensive against the mighty British Empire to achieve freedom and the right to live and work with dignity for our people. They had fought with a mission and were able to motivate the people to fight for freedom. On the 150th year of the 1857 War of Independence, an event of great significance to a substantial section of the South Asian family, and in many ways for the whole region, let us pay our respectful homage to the memory of all those who perished in that great War to secure freedom and dignity. They had a great mission 150 years ago; we have a mission today to make our region cooperative, peaceful and prosperous.

The fraternity of parliamentarians and the media of SAARC countries, through mutual co-operation and consultation, can enormously help the cause of peace and prosperity in the region. I sincerely hope that this meeting here will be able to impart a new direction and momentum to the peace process and further strengthen the people-to-people contacts in this part of the world. I heartily compliment the SAFMA for organizing this Conference here in Shimla which was witness to several historical events which had a strong bearing on the future of this region.

With these words, I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Second Conference of Parliamentarians of SAARC countries.

Thank you.

COMMUNICATING PARLIAMENT TO THE NATION*

I am indeed grateful to Respected Up-Rashtrapatiji and the other dignitaries who have made it convenient to attend this very special function organized to mark the successful completion of one year by the Lok Sabha Television, as a 24-hour Channel. At the outset, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartiest felicitations to all those associated with this Channel.

Sixty years into Independence, India has emerged as the largest working democracy in the world. The members of Parliament are elected by the people and that being so, Parliament represents their sovereign will. It is, therefore, essential that people have the means to know how the Parliament functions and to help comprehend as to what extent it is playing its role in our political system to translate the people's aspirations into reality.

As we all agree, the media is an integral part of the parliamentary system and necessarily it has a vital role to play in strengthening our parliamentary edifice. While Parliament enacts laws for the people and approves measures for the good governance of the country, the media is expected to act as an interface between the institutions of democracy and its patrons, the people. It helps to bring in transparency in the activities of the Government and in ensuring that the public institutions function in a responsive and responsible manner. It is only by respecting each other's roles and responsibilities that the Parliament and the media can develop a healthy and cooperative relationship, which is vital for strengthening our democratic structure.

Today, we have a large number of television Channels catering to almost all segments of our society. In addition to the regular news Channels, we have Channels addressing the needs of specific sections of the community and dedicated Channels on particular themes. In this respect, what was left out was the Parliament and its members who, paradoxically, are the ones entrusted with the task of running the affairs of the largest democracy in the world. The role of the Parliament and parliamentarians had hardly been constructively shown on the normal channels. Only the uproar and the outbursts in Parliament were highlighted in all Channels, while its substantial

* At the First Anniversary of the Lok Sabha Television Channel and release of Book "Speaker Rules" authored by Shri P.D.T. Achary, Secretary-General, Lok Sabha, New Delhi (20 August 2007).

work for national development was almost completely ignored or was relegated to the background. In the process, only a partial and negative picture was shown of our political system in general and the Parliament in particular. This has been only causing a feeling of cynicism among our people about our institutions of democracy. I am not suggesting that all is well with the functioning of these institutions. Nevertheless, I believe that there are many positive things about them which would merit to be highlighted in the media.

With the rapid advancement in technology, in recent years, many Parliaments have started telecasting their proceedings. The Indian Parliament took the first step towards televising parliamentary proceedings on 20 December 1989 when the Address by the President to the members of the two Houses assembled together in the Central Hall was telecast and broadcast live for the first time. Over the years, we have gone far in communicating Parliament to the nation at large.

In a significant development, in December 2004, we launched two separate dedicated satellite Channels for telecasting live the entire proceedings of the two Houses of Parliament nationwide. Going a step further, the Lok Sabha TV Channel, independent of the Doordarshan, was launched on 11 May 2006. In effect, the Lok Sabha Television Channel is a technological extension of the Visitors' Gallery to the far corners of the country. This Channel, which is a unique platform for providing the citizens an unprecedented access to the working of our parliamentary democracy, became functional as a 24-hour Channel from 24 July 2006 with a number of value-added and informative programmes, enhancing its value for the viewers.

Since then, the LSTV Channel, by televising parliamentary proceedings, and covering various parliamentary events and activities, has helped in bringing the institution of Parliament nearer to the people. Besides parliamentary proceedings, the Channel telecasts important programmes about the work being done in the Parliamentary Committees, their reports, etc. This assumes added significance because it is in the Parliamentary Committees that substantial work of Parliament is done, an aspect which is not known in its full extent by the people at large. Apart from this, the Channel organises discussions by experts on various contemporary issues facing the country. The Channel also highlights issues connected with different political parties and covers views of their leaders. Parliamentarians are also invited to participate in the programmes on subjects of contemporary relevance, providing them an opportunity to express the viewpoints of their respective parties on important political, economic and international issues. I need hardly say that all these are very important for the smooth functioning of our parliamentary democracy, which can only thrive through a healthy Party System.

Being a Parliamentary Channel, it is only appropriate that the thrust of its performance is on familiarising the people with the operational and functional dynamics of our Parliament. The Channel also attempts to educate the people through informative programmes on the issues before our Parliament. That way, it is one of the very rare Channels that is devoted to public affairs and issues of the times and is not driven by mindless consumerism. The LSTV is different from the other Channels as it focuses on issues of development and with matters such as health, education, environment, gender, children, etc. which are of prime concern to the common people. Apart form this, it offers a programming mix related to social development, culture, heritage, constitutional issues, infotainment, etc., thereby exposing the people to broader issues concerning the nation and our times. I also understand that quite a few new programmes are slated to be launched soon, which will make the Channel more informative and interesting.

I am told the size of the target segment for the current LSTV programmes is about 6 per cent of Satellite/Cable TV viewers. In actual number, there are about 14 million LSTV viewers, who are mostly from the middle and upper classes of society, and academics, the NGO sector and Government employees. I am also told that the average age of the target audience is about 35 years which is indeed a positive sign. The Channel has a contemporary look-and-feel and is not only responsive to the needs of the audience but is also acting as a true link between the citizens and their representatives. This Channel is today helping us in developing an informed citizenry about the varied activities of Parliament and in creating a close link between the House of the People and the electorate who are the real masters in a democracy.

The commissioning of the LSTV Channel and the complete live coverage today was an effort to put things in perspective before the people who now have the opportunity to see for themselves, gavel to gavel, how Parliament and its members function. They are now better equipped to assess the contributions as well as the failings of our parliamentarians. And that in itself is a significant achievement insofar as the LSTV is concerned.

I am sure that through the medium of the LSTV, the people will be able to have a better insight into the political, parliamentary, cultural, social and other aspects of our national life. I have no doubt, that gradually this Channel will gain more popularity and in the process further educate the people about our parliamentary dynamics and at the same time, make our parliamentarians to be more sensitive to the expectations of their constituents and lead to a better understanding of their own parliamentary conduct and functioning. This initiative, I believe, in the long run, will contribute towards strengthening our democratic fabric as such.

All credit goes to the Channel's Chief Executive Shri Bhaskar Ghosh and his team of dedicated officers who have done an excellent job in making the LSTV a great success. The Secretary-General of Lok Sabha and his committed team of officers as well as Dr. T. Kumar, my Principal Secretary have also facilitated substantially the smooth operation of the Channel. My best wishes to all those who are connected with the LSTV Channel which has evolved in less than a year as the People's Channel.

Today, I have great pleasure in releasing the book titled 'Speaker Rules' authored by Secretary General, Lok Sabha, Shri P.D.T. Achary. It is an important publication from the view point of the parliamentary processes and procedures. In this book, an effort has been made to present the rulings in a systematic and coherent manner. I am sure that this publication will be found very useful and informative by the Presiding Officers as also parliamentarians.

Thank you.

MEDIA AS PEOPLE'S VOICE—PRE-AND POST-INDEPENDENCE*

I deem it an honour to have the opportunity to associate myself with this event organized by the Press Council of India to celebrate the National Press Day and to share some of my views with this august gathering on the issue of 'Media's role as the people's voice – Pre and Post Independence' for which I thank Justice G.N. Ray, the Chairman and the members of the Council.

The Press Council of India functions as an interface between the media and the civil society and as a kind of Ombudsman helping the press conduct itself in a manner consistent with journalistic ethics and with a commitment to societal needs.

Media refers to mass communication, that is, communication to people at large. The process of communication can be by different means: in the years before Independence, the communication was mainly through newspapers and journals but that was not the only form. Earlier when newspapers reached only a limited number of persons those who could read, with literacy then confined to the small percentage of people mainly in the cities and towns, there were other means – namely, songs. Many patriotic songs like those composed by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendra Lal Roy in Bengali and Subramaniam Bharati in Tamil for example, became extremely popular and were sung by people, mainly students, which inspired the people more than perhaps editorials in newspapers. There were also plays written and acted by patriots and freedom lovers such as IPTA in Bengal, in what was then Bombay and other parts of India. They also carried messages and views as the newspapers did, very effectively.

But the major medium prior to Independence was of course the newspapers and journals and they could be divided into two groups. Many of the latter were in different languages, some like *Sambad Kaumudi* being brought out as early as 1821, by Raja Rammohan Roy. The 19th Century saw a number of newspapers and journals published in Calcutta, Bombay and Punjab; in later years, a number of papers were brought out in English, such as *The Hindu* from Madras. This was the chief medium of communication,

* At the Discussion on *Media as People's Voice–Pre-and Post-Independence* on the occasion of the National Press Day, New Delhi (16 November 2007).

and it was the communication of information that they were engaged in – of what was happening in the country.

During the years of freedom struggle, since the late 18th and early 19th Century onwards, many of the newspapers strongly supported the emergence of the liberation movement and forcefully advocated freedom and inspired the people to fight against colonialism and exploitation by the alien rulers and they provided a platform to the leaders to spread their message as wide as they could reach.

Despite the fact that the reach of these newspapers and journals was much smaller than it is today, it was wide enough for the British to pass a number of laws to restrict the freedom of expression available to these papers. They clearly recognized the effect that the dissemination of the ideas in these papers and journals had on the growing number of educated Indians, and that it was from among these that the leadership of groups of Indians would emerge, as in fact, it did. From the Press Regulations promulgated by Lord Wellesley in 1799 to the infamous Press Act of 1857 promulgated by Lord Canning, which came to be known as the Gagging Act because of the virtually unfettered powers it gave the Government to ban or prohibit the publication of practically everything, the supervision of mass communication was under constant scrutiny. Ten years later, in 1867, the Government came out with yet another law, the Press and Registration of Books Act. In 1878 Lord Lytton promulgated The Vernacular Press Act and in 1908, Lord Minto issued The Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act that authorized local authorities to take action against the editor of any newspaper that published any matter considered an offence or incitement to an offence.

If, then, we look at the media as communication in pre-Independence days, one feature that stands out is that it clearly reflected what was stirring among the people at the time, the restlessness and resentment against foreign rule, witnessed in demonstrations in towns and villages. The latter were put down harshly by the police and armed forces; and the media was controlled by the plethora of laws that were in force.

Nor was the print medium the only one to be so controlled; in 1876, The Dramatic Performances Act was promulgated which controlled all dramatic performances. It highlighted the British awareness of the effect of theatre as a means of communication, as a medium conveying information.

The other feature that distinguishes the media in pre-Independence times is the fact that by and large the owners of newspapers and journals were themselves activists in the one cause that united almost all Indians – the struggle for freedom. From the early days of Raja Rammohan Roy to the establishment in Calcutta, of 'Hindu Patriot' which was initially managed by

Girish Chandra Ghosh and subsequently edited by Harish Chandra Mukherjee a paper that systematically wrote on the terrible condition of the farmers forced to grow indigo for British landowners, to the establishment of papers like *Amrita Bazar Patrika* first in Jessore, and then later in Calcutta, to the weeklies started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1919, *Young India* and *Navjivan*, the founders were involved in one way or the other with the one cause that was foremost in the minds of most Indians. This fusion, if I may call it that, was a remarkable feature of those times.

The dissemination of information, the phenomenon we call mass communication, was seen, and accepted to be an aspect of the patriotic fervour of the times. I would like to add a third feature to the nature of pre-independence media and that is the almost universal courage that was shown by the founder editors of the times, who braved the often savage repression by British authorities for some editorial or article that they had written. Many were jailed, only to come out and resume their activities of presenting their readers with the truth about the struggle for freedom as well as the conditions that Indians had to suffer in those times.

It has to be borne in mind that the number of the papers and journals that were published in those times were small, relative to the present day. Nor were the number of copies of daily newspapers as many as they are now; given the old-style machines where pages were set by hand and number of copies printed were necessarily modest, compared to the million copies being printed of some of the bigger papers being published today. But it would be true to say that each copy was read by more people, and that the effect of what was written in each copy was very profound, even inspiring. Gandhiji knew the value of the articles published in *Young India* and never ever stopped writing for it, except when the presses were seized by the police.

In pre-Independence India, there were two kinds of newspapers and journals, one that was, if not overtly then covertly, supportive of the colonial power, and another that spoke for the nation's needs, of the aspirations of the people, that pointed out injustice and oppression and for whom draconian laws were put in place to muzzle them; secondly, those who started, or owned of published or edited these were themselves actively involved in the freedom movement in one way or the other. Though the number of copies and the number of publications were limited, partly because of administrative obstruction and partly because of technological limitations, the effect of what was printed and circulated was profound, even inspirational.

Independence brought with it, within a few years, our Constitution, which has guaranteed freedom of speech and expression to all citizens, and thus the

shackles on press freedom were done away with, excepting for the 'reasonable restrictions' provided for in Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

The Press in India in early years of Independence showed its commitment to truth and to transparency. The initial years saw the emergence of a feature that had not been there before: ownership of some newspapers passed from founders and editor-publishers to commercial concerns. For some years, while the interest of some of the owners did shift more to the revenue earned by the papers, the editors were left free to determine what editorial policy would be. That was an age of great editors, who virtually set the standards of impartiality and independence that became an integral part of the print media.

Other factors came into play here; chief among them was the advent of radically new technology, that made it possible to print millions of copies, and set pages on computers, making the production of papers not only fast but more economical. Then the satellite age made it possible to send content from one office to another, so that local editions could be produced simultaneously. The other factor was the burgeoning advertising industry and the enormous amounts it poured into advertising in newspapers and journals – indeed, it is said that today some newspapers can afford to give away their copies free, since their main revenue, that runs into may be crores daily, comes from advertising, not from sale of papers, as used to be the case in pre-Independence India.

In sections of the Press, it appears that now more importance is given to the marketing divisions of the newspapers' offices, than to the editors. It is said that in some newspapers, the marketing division decides what will 'sell' the paper in terms of news and how they will do it. Thus it is that we are no longer surprised to read, on the front page of some leading paper, of the eating habits of some personality from the entertainment industry or someone who has won some much publicized contest of some kind. Sadly news relating to the condition of the country is relegated to the other pages, inside.

But, overshadowing all that has been happening and is happening to the newspapers, is the most powerful medium of all — television. From a modest beginning to being the handmaiden of the Central Government of the day, television has, since it went into private hands, grown exponentially, especially news channels in English, Hindi and the regional languages. But one has to think whether the development of television, especially television news, in the country has been on the right direction.

Private news channels are not merely news providers. They make no secret of the fact that they are entirely dependent on advertising revenue, and it appears that advertisers have poured enormous amounts into those channels they perceive as getting the larger numbers of viewers. This has had

two effects; one is that, in the fierce competition to get more viewership, some channels have not scrupled at compromises with the truth. There has recently been an unsavoury incident of a so-called 'sting' operation that was shown to be false, perpetrated with the object of blackmailing the victim. Others have taken recourse to making their channels more sensational, and all manner of stories are shown as news. 'Breaking news' which usually meant something major that was about to occur or was occurring just then, is now a regular routine feature of all news channels.

However, I must clarify that we have a number of channels that have always maintained the high standards of journalistic integrity, and have as a consequence retained the trust of the viewers; but these, again, are not so many.

The basic feature of post-Independence media is the change in the nature of ownership. Owning a channel or a newspaper is now seen as a profit-making venture, as indeed it is in all countries where advertising sustains the profitability of a channel or paper. This, in itself, is not necessarily antithetical to a channel or newspaper's credibility. There are owners who are committed to their papers and channels observing the highest standards of journalistic propriety. But, as I have said they are few in number, and the number of those who see the 'packaging' of news as an essential requirement to earning more money seem to be growing.

A feature that merits highlighting is the fact that, owing to the single minded obsession with perceived market requirements, those elements of the governance of our country that were at one time considered of vital importance — the proper functioning of the three arms of our democracy, the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive – no longer warrant the attention they got in earlier years. They are noticed, by and large, only when there is something of sensationalist value of some event relating to them, not otherwise.

This is not only unfortunate but also undesirable, as the power of the media, especially of television, is very great in influencing perceptions of viewers, and the images that then remain with people in general are not just negative, but incorrect. To give just one example – it is true that the proceedings of Parliament are disrupted more often than is healthy for a democracy, but it is also true that there are debates held in Parliament, and the numerous Committees of Parliament meet regularly and place their reports before Parliament as they are required to do. But this second aspect is hardly ever mentioned by any newspaper, journal or television channel, which amounts to nothing short of presenting a distorted version of what goes on in Parliament.

The recent comments by one of the most respected members of the Fourth Estate, Shri Kuldip Nayar, merits to be mentioned here: Drawing our attention to the indifferent or inadequate reporting of Parliament in the media he said:

> 'Serious stories which include the Parliamentary proceedings, do not make the grade (for the media). The media has come to believe that people do not want to read anything which makes them think. Today, the print media is suffering from a mad disease which has played havoc with our newspapers. It is the tabloid syndrome ...'

Another respected journalist, Dr. Harish Khare has drawn our attention to the dangers of trivializing political institutions when he said:

> 'Of late we appear to be on the verge of entering a dangerous phase. There seems to be a new arrogance: (that) the government does not deserve to be respected. .... The assumption is that the elected representatives of the people cannot be trusted with the public interest, and that it is up to the unelected gods – in the judiciary, the media, civil society, the private sector – to step in and to 'save the nation.' ... Because of a breakdown in the norms of self-restraint among those who fancy themselves as guardians of the constitutional order and public interest, we have produced a script for paralysis'.

Today the newspapers and the private channels cover the stock markets with an obsessive detail but not the details of the debates in Parliament on major policy issues like agriculture or commodity inflation. Thus debates have ceased to be reported and we have the spectacle of newspapers and news channels spending considerable space and their time either telling us about the latest developments in the social lives of those who are in the entertainment industry or some favourite sports persons or giving unsolicited astrological advice or covering extramarital affairs of even ordinary people sometimes and bizarre stories from remote corners like snake gods drinking milk in a particular home. Substantial space is provided to cover parties and weddings of the rich and the famous with great detail than the problems of the farmers or of suicides among them.

Press freedom is not without responsibility; the media must desist from distorted or concocted reporting, highlighting only those aspects of an issue that suits it and making omissions that ought to have been made public. Editorial policy of newspapers should not be directed by the prejudices of media moguls and media barons. While profit is indeed a motive in the media world, that in itself should not be the sole criterion when it comes to news and views on the issues before the nation.

The increasing level of particular types of content in the print and electronic media is a matter of concern. Today, it appears, the most important page for most mainstream newspapers is the overbearing 'page 3'. In fact, sometimes I find it difficult to distinguish between page 1 of many newspapers and the famous page 3, which, at times, is only a reference page for all the numerous pages that follow that in the day's newspaper. It is for the media itself to ponder on the long-term implications of their acts on the society at large. More than ever before, today there is an imperative to strengthen our national fabric and the ideals we cherish like democracy, secularism, pluralism, etc. Unfortunately, of late, we find a tendency among a section of the media to project partisan points of view in the name of dissemination of views, rather than news, which is factual and objective. The glory of the media is in its presentation of information based on truth. Sadly, this basic duty is at times forgotten by sections of the press. Except for some honourable exceptions, today the newspapers' or the TV Channels' political leaning and political predilections are well-known and those obviously affect dispassionate presentation of news and also views.

Democracy is unthinkable without a free press and its success depends to a large extent on the kind of role the media plays as interface between the Parliament and the people. We all know that it was on the basis of disclosures in the media that the Parliament of India was able to take stringent action against some of its members for their acts of misdemeanour causing to undermine the credibility of democratic institutions in the country.

Parliament is at the heart of democracy and that being so, it deserves serious attention from all quarters, be it the people, the Executive, the Judiciary, the civil society groups or the media. It is in Parliament that important decisions are taken and the Government is made accountable and I feel that the responsibility of the media to inform and educate people on various issues that are before the Parliament. While trying to expose the misdeeds and corrupt practices of the public authorities, including the people's representatives, the media would do well to report their commendable initiatives and works as well. Giving publicity only to the interruptions, disturbances and adjournments in Parliament, as if nothing else takes place there, gives a distorted picture of our elected representatives and projects Parliament and parliamentarians only negatively and ever derogatorily.

It pains me to say that the media hardly gives adequate coverage to the Parliament and has failed to project the institution with the respect and seriousness it deserves. I have been requesting the media whenever I get an opportunity to correct this imbalance and I would like to use this platform to appeal to the media once again to give due coverage to all the important works transacted in Parliament and its Committees and not just get obsessed

with the disturbances which no doubt need to be checked and adversely commented upon. We all need to remember that a free media thrives only in a democracy and, therefore, it should be the endeavour of the media also to ensure that cynicism does not pervade the minds of the people *vis-a-vis* our democratic institutions and it is in the interest of the media that they make efforts to deepen democracy and sustain people's trust in the system.

It has been a remarkable journey that the media has made, as the voice of the people. That is, indeed, what it was in the pre-Independence days, and what some newspapers and television channels still are today. But what is mentioned in many quarters that sadly market forces have come into and affected the credibility of the media and done it considerable damage, damage that does affect even those dedicated, principled papers and channels that do not stoop to the less desirable means of purveying news and of events they pass of as news.

While we can applaud the media for its independence in most matters, it is necessary for all those involved, from newspapers to television channels to the internet news providers to institute a process of continuous introspection to ensure that theirs are the most transparent, and truthful purveyors of information. I say this because we have come to expect this of our media and we would like to continue to be as proud of it as we have been in the past.

In this very challenging task the Press Council has a key role to play. It may not need to have draconian powers — indeed, it should not — but it needs to have the respect of all newspapers and news channels and it is for all of them to sit together to determine how best this can be done. As we have seen time after time, where law has not been effective, consent has been. It is time that this matter is given serious thought by all those who profess to abide by the truth above everything else.

Thank you.

JOURNALISM: A GREAT MISSION*

I am honoured to be here with you all at this function organized to present the Karpoor Chandra Kulish International Award for Excellence in Journalism, instituted by the *Rajasthan Patrika*, in honour of its illustrious founder editor and proprietor. I compliment the *Rajasthan Patrika* for instituting this prestigious international award with a view to fostering values of ethics, integrity, morality and a sense of social responsibility among those associated with the Media, a crucial pillar of democracy.

I extend my heartiest felicitations to Shri Nilesh Misra, Senior Editor, *Hindustan Times*, Delhi and his team for their news story, 'The New Muslim Series' and Shri Afsan Subhai, Assistant Editor, *Dawn* and his team for their news story, 'Why does Corporate Pakistan Distance Democracy?', on being chosen as the first recipients of the Award for Excellence in Journalism. Over the years, both *Hindustan Times* and *Dawn* have made commendable contributions in the field of Journalism. Socially sensitive journalists like Shri Nilesh Misra and Shri Afsan Subhai provide inspiration to others to stand by their convictions in the discharge of their professional responsibilities. I compliment the distinguished members of the jury for their choice.

It is a matter of great significance that two responsible Journalists from two important newspapers from India and Pakistan are being recognized for their important contributions in the matters of public concern, which are of relevance to both of our countries. We have gathered here this evening, to honour not only two individuals who discharged their professional responsibilities in a remarkable manner, but also to honour the institution they represent for discharging its primary social responsibility in a commendable manner.

Since its inception in 1956, the *Rajasthan Patrika* under the visionary leadership of its founder editor, Shri Karpoor Chandra Kulish, has carved out a niche for itself in the field of print media. With its roots in Rajasthan, the newspaper made a modest beginning, about half a century back, but is today one of the leading daily newspapers in Hindi with large circulation of over 1.15 crore in different States of India. The newspaper has been articulating public opinion on a wide range of regional, national and international issues

* At the function to give away the *Rajasthan Patrika's* Karpoor Chandra Kulish International Award for Excellence in Journalism, New Delhi (12 March 2008).

and promoting the spirit of unity and national integration. Its proactive campaigns on numerous contemporary issues have indeed been greatly acclaimed by its large and dedicated readership. The institution of the Karpoor Chandra Kulish International Award for Excellence in Journalism, is not only a landmark event in the history of the *Rajasthan Patrika*, it is also a befitting tribute to Late Karpoor Chandra Kulish who had nurtured this remarkable newspaper with utmost commitment and farsightedness.

The theme of the Award, *human development*, refers to a very important component of a progressive society. It pre-supposes that equitable opportunities for enhanced capabilities and empowerment are made available to the present as well as the future generations and the fruits of development are shared by all. Human development is a comprehensive concept which includes every endeavour directed to achieve the primary objective of creating an enabling and ennobling environment for people everywhere to lead long, healthy, fulfilling and productive lives. I appreciate the initiative taken in choosing the theme which has great relevance in strengthening the roots of democracy in any society where the media serves as a useful link between those in power and the people.

Friends, a vibrant and free media can contribute substantially towards creating an informed citizenry, which, to my mind, is one of the greatest assets for a democracy. This is particularly so in the case of the print media, including the Hindi and other vernacular newspapers, whose reach is substantially wider. Some of the largest selling newspapers and magazines in India are in Hindi and our various regional languages. The vernacular press, particularly newspapers with sizeable circulation and good credentials like the *Rajasthan Patrika*, can play a significant role as educators and disseminators of information. The representatives of the media are expected to contribute effectively and meaningfully in this process through their insightful writings and objective reporting for building an inclusive and egalitarian society.

The introduction of the Press in India in the second half of the 19th Century had tremendous impact on the course of the freedom movement and on the history of the country in the years that followed freedom. The attitude of partnership and cooperation between the media and the political leadership gave a strong fillip to our freedom struggle and helped considerably in awakening the vast sections of our people to the objectives and inevitability of the country's fight for liberation from bondage.

Our Founding Fathers had recognized freedom of the Press as an integral component of any democratic society as they believed that democracy cannot be nurtured and operated successfully without a free Press. Thus 'freedom of speech and expression' became an important component of our exhaustive list of Fundamental Rights of citizens itself. With the installation of

democratically elected governments both at the Centre and in the States, the media was expected to act as a watchdog over governance of the country while simultaneously acting as the medium of information to the people based on truth and objectivity and also for articulating their grievances. Media indeed should be in the forefront of the campaign to promote democratic values in society and in establishing a system of government that works for the people and is accountable to them. The media discharged those functions with a great sense of responsibility in the early years of freedom, contributing significantly towards consolidating our freedom and democracy.

The Press rightly enjoys considerable power in playing the role of a watchdog over the government and the corporate world, in influencing decisions and setting trends, transmitting ideas and information and giving voice to the poor and the deprived. At the same time, the Press has to see that it exercises its power for the ultimate good of the society and not out of any personal vendetta. We want our Press to be fearless and unbiased, and at the same time, it should abjure mere sensationalism and projections based on its own predilections.

It is extremely important that the journalist or the Editor does not project the views of his or her own or of the management as news. The views can certainly be expressed in the editorials as well as in the signed articles. In the media, as indeed in any aspect of human life, the truth should never be compromised nor should anybody indulge in half-truths, which will negate the noble principles which media is expected to follow.

A feature that merits highlighting is the fact that, in some sections of the Media, owing to the single minded obsession with perceived market requirements, those elements of the governance of our country that were at one time considered of vital importance—the proper functioning of the three arms of our democracy, the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive—no longer receive the attention they got in earlier years. They are noticed, by and large, only when there is something of sensationalist value of some event relating to them, not otherwise.

As I had stated elsewhere, today many newspapers and private channels cover the stock markets with an obsessive detail but not the details of the debates in Parliament on major policy issues like agriculture or commodity inflation. Thus debates have ceased to be reported and we have the spectacle of newspapers and news channels spending considerable space and their time either telling us about the latest developments in the social lives of those who are in the entertainment industry or some favourite sports persons or giving unsolicited astrological advice or covering extramarital affairs of even ordinary people sometimes and bizarre stories from remote corners like snake gods drinking milk in a particular home. Substantial space is provided to

cover parties and weddings of the rich and the famous with great detail than the problems of the farmers or of suicides among them.

This is not only unfortunate but also undesirable, as the power of the media, especially of television, is very great in influencing perceptions of viewers, and the images that remain with people in general are not just negative, but incorrect. To give just one example—it is true that the proceedings of Parliament are disrupted more often than is healthy for a democracy, but it is also true that there are debates held in Parliament, and the numerous Committees of Parliament meet regularly and place their reports before Parliament as they are required to do. But this second aspect is hardly ever mentioned by any newspaper, journal or television channel, which amounts to nothing short of presenting a distorted version of what goes on in Parliament.

The recent comments by one of the respected members of the Fourth Estate, Shri Kuldip Nayar, merit to be mentioned here:

> A newspaper or a TV channel is not a dustbin for dumping drivel, film gossip and other trivia. It must have news. It must have information. It must educate the public about events with background information and editorial comments. One of the reasons why it has happened [the media failing in its primary responsibilities] is: people who run the newspapers or TV channels in our country think that the media is just like any other commodity. It should be nicely packaged because their idea of nice packaging means filling it with semi-nude colour pictures of models and actresses and trash.

Parliament, in the performance of its duties, over the years, has not only widened and deepened the rule of law by a network of key legislation in all areas, it has also served the national interest by holding the other institutions accountable to it and by keeping a watch over the functioning of every other institution of our democracy. We should not allow anything which would make our citizens become cynical and lose interest in the democratic process, at the heart of which stands the Parliament. This is the message I have been humbly trying to convey during my meetings with larger audiences in all parts of the country and I seek the co-operation of the media, which are the eyes and ears of the people, in this onerous task. We must remember that a free media is one of the greatest offshoots of democracy—they survive together or collapse together.

As a Parliamentarian, I have applauded the media for its role in exposing the malfeasance and corruption in our public activities. In Parliament, we have taken action whenever misdeeds of our members were exposed by the media. Long ago, Mahatma Gandhi had given the prescription for a

newspaper: "One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand the popular feelings and give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments; and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects."

India functioning under a Parliamentary Democracy is making giant strides for development in various sectors but there are forces trying to thwart the process by weakening the democratic structure itself. Nobody can suggest nor is suggesting any better alternative to Parliamentary Democracy in which the Parliament as an Institution, undoubtedly, occupies the central position. As the representative body of the people, it is the forum which approves the policies and programmes of the Government of the day as also where the peoples' issues are debated and discussed to seek solutions. Each and every member of the House of People represents a sizeable section of the people of the country and the source of authority of the members is obviously the sanction of the people. To my mind, any attempt to denigrate or diminish the importance of Parliament or to stifle its proper functioning is not only an attack on the foundations of our democratic existence but also on our basic Constitutional edifice itself which provides for the people's rights as also the framework for solving the people's problems through the Parliamentary processes.

Press freedom is not without responsibility; the media must desist from distorted or concocted reporting, highlighting only those aspects of an issue that suits it and making omissions that ought to have been made public. Editorial policy of a newspaper should not be directed by the prejudices of media *moguls* and media barons. While profit is indeed a motive in the media world, that in itself should not be the sole criterion when it comes to news and views on the issues before the nation.

I am not suggesting that our Parliament can be emulated as an example of ideal behaviour. There is tremendous scope for improvement within it. To quote Shri Nayar again: 'The country's misfortune is that MPs do not seem to appreciate the burden put on their shoulders. The voters hope against hope that some day they would rise to their responsibility and give people a better Parliament.' But that can happen not by denigrating the institution as such but by encouraging well-meaning and committed people, particularly our youth, to enter the portals of our democratic institutions. Our representative institutions will only reflect the larger society they represent and we cannot expect a total disconnect between the two.

Undoubtedly, it is the primary duty of the legislators themselves to sustain the dignity and image of the Parliament, but in my humble view, that responsibility does not rest exclusively on the legislators. If there is no democracy, there will be no Freedom of the Press. Therefore, it is the vested

interest of the Media also to see that the Parliament and the Parliamentary System flourish in a manner which, while sustaining people's faith in the system, maintains and enhances the dignity of the Parliament. In fact, every limb of our democratic structure must recognise that the most important imponderable that goes into the sustenance of democracy is the people's faith in its institutions. Preservation of the image and identity of the institutions should become a core concern for all institutions of democracy.

To my mind, the Parliament and the Media share a responsibility to contribute to the political, economic and social developments in ways consistent with democratic principles which will help the proper functioning of the democratic institutions. My request to the Media is to provide balanced coverage of public policy debates without trivializing or denigrating the parliamentary and governmental decision-making processes, and the Parliament in turn, recognize the value of fair and accurate reporting as a channel for public feedback to assist them in the process of legislation, policy-making and in scrutinizing the performance of the Government.

Unfortunately, our polity today is overtaken by extremely partisan and confrontational politics. There is an atmosphere of intolerance, if not hatred, to each other, which is substantially affecting the political morality of our country. My appeal to the distinguished and well-meaning friends in the Media is that they have to very seriously ponder and see whether it has any role in isolating the forces of disruption and divisiveness and to consider how to do it. In my very humble opinion, so long as the detractors feel that their disruptive activities receive greater media attention than the discharge of duties in a normal and constructive way, then it will only help to encourage those who should otherwise be isolated. I often get an impression that many actions in our political functioning today are influenced by the perceived importance given by the Media. Recently, I was told by one of the prominent leaders of a Party that disruption of the proceedings of the House are politically more rewarding than a structured debate in the House because while such disruptions get the headlines, the debate, if at all reported, is in the inner pages and that too least prominently.

I always identify journalism as a great mission, and not merely as a profession. It is a mission to uphold and promote certain cherished values and lofty ideals. Such a noble mission calls for commitment, and courage of conviction of the kind demonstrated by those who laid the foundation of a free Press in India during the years of our struggle for freedom. The special position and power that the Media enjoys today, under the shadow of democracy should be used to strengthen democracy in all possible ways rather than to undermine it from within.

I am pleased to find that vernacular newspapers like the *Rajasthan Patrika* have been shouldering their responsibility with professionalism and commitment to the larger social good. I once again congratulate the *Rajasthan Patrika* for serving relentlessly for more than five decades as an agent of mass communication and political socialization, as a forum for public debate and as a watchdog to our democracy.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again extend my heartiest congratulations to Shri Nilesh Misra and his team in the *Hindustan Times* and Shri Afsan Subhai and his team in the *Dawn* on being honoured with the Karpoor Chandra Kulish International Award for excellence in Journalism. I am sure that these newspapers will continue with their praiseworthy efforts to promote the lofty ideals of broad-mindedness, humanism, pluralism, democracy and egalitarianism which they have always cherished and nurtured.

Thank you.

REPORTING RURAL INDIA*

It is indeed a matter of pleasure and an honour for me to be here and to have the opportunity to associate myself with this function organised to present the Award instituted by the distinguished journalist and winner of Ramon Magsaysay Award, Shri P. Sainath, with a view to encouraging Telugu journalists in reporting the problems confronting rural Andhra Pradesh. It is of great symbolic importance that this function is being organized in this Hall named after Comrade P. Sundarayya who had devoted his whole life for the cause of the farmers and the working class. At the outset, I would like to heartily compliment Shri Sainath on instituting this unique Award to encourage the Media professionals to highlight the issues confronting the rural people and, in the process, helping to bring them in our political agenda. I convey my heartiest felicitations to the three distinguished and committed journalists, Shri Uma Maheswara Rao, Smt. Udaya Lakshmi and Shri G. Srinivas who have been chosen to receive the Awards. I also extend my compliments to the distinguished members of the Jury for their choice of the Awardees.

Shri P. Sainath has made commendable contributions in highlighting issues like rural distress, the alarming increase in the incidents of farmers' suicide, the disconnect between the precepts and practices of the Governments and corruption, among other important issues, which are otherwise low on the national agenda, through his insightful and incisive writings. In September last year, the members of our Parliament had the opportunity to listen to Shri Sainath on issues relating to the farm crisis and farmers' suicides, at the Lecture organized by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training of the Lok Sabha Secretariat for the benefit of the members of Parliament. His passionate espousal of the cause of the rural masses, his profound understanding of the problems afflicting the common man and his critical analysis of the issues at stake were greatly appreciated by the large gathering of the members of Parliament. Shri Sainath has rightly earned great regard and respect from across the country through his brilliant articulation of the trials and travails of rural India.

As the Rural Affairs Editor of the reputed newspaper, *The Hindu*, he has created a niche for himself in the field of journalism. His sensitive portrayal

* At the functiong to give away the Award instituted by Shri P. Sainath to Telugu journalists, Hyderabad (11 May 2008).

of social problems and his identification with the cause of the poor, particularly the small and the marginal farmers, find their reflection in his reporting and writings, which have appropriately earned him well-deserved recognition and acclaim as a brilliant Development Journalist. Inspired by his feeling of social sensitivity and commitment to the welfare of the poor, particularly the rural poor, Shri Sainath has instituted this Award for journalists reporting rural problems which do not always find adequate media attention. The areas identified by the jury, like, poverty, agriculture, education, public health, issues before the *Dalits* and the tribal people, the differently abled and of gender, cover the entire gamut of issues related to rural distress today.

Despite making spectacular progress in various fields, we cannot lose sight of the fact that our country is still afflicted with multifarious problems of poverty, unemployment, ignorance and socio-economic inequality. The new economic forces of today, no doubt, are bringing along with them new opportunities for development and for contributing to nation-building. It is, however, important for us to ensure that our growth is inclusive and that we do not leave anyone behind and that the benefit of development reaches every one, particularly the rural masses who have not been effectively touched by the efforts of the past nearly six decades of freedom. The policies and programmes formulated to augment economic growth should also contribute towards improving the lives of the poor and the vulnerable sections of our society.

More than 70 per cent of our population reside in villages and 80 per cent of our poor also live in rural areas. It is a matter of concern that the benefits of economic growth are not percolating to more than two-thirds of our population. The divide between the economic infrastructure in rural and urban areas is wide and the gap is unfortunately widening day by day. Crop failures due to unpredictable climatic variations, inability to meet the rising cost of cultivation and the increasing debt burden are among the factors leading our farmers to growing frustration expressed in extreme ways. In recent years, the agricultural growth in India has fallen and so have investment and profitability of agriculture, net sown area under crops and the area under irrigation. It is apprehended that the Indian peasantry is today faced with a crisis of very serious dimension. According to the *Economic Survey 2006-2007*, low yield per unit area across almost all crops has become a regular feature of the Indian agriculture.

Traditionally and even today, as it is universally accepted, agriculture is the backbone of our economy. Though the share of agriculture in the gross domestic product has registered a steady decline from 36.4 per cent in 1982-83 to 18.5 per cent in 2006-07, the agricultural sector continues to sustain more than half a billion people, providing employment to 52 per cent of the

workforce. It is also an important source of raw material and absorbs many industrial products, particularly fertilizers, pesticides, agricultural implements and a variety of consumer goods. The very fact that the growth of agriculture, over a period of time, has remained much lower than the growth in the non-agriculture sectors itself will explain the unpleasant plight of the rural people. As such, today there is a greater need than ever before to critically analyse and address the problems facing this sector. To this end, initiatives on the part of the Media will definitely have their positive impact on policy formulation for the rural economic sector and on their effective implementation.

Poverty, hunger and healthcare represent some of the major challenges before rural India. The unenviable plight of the landless labourers and the small and marginalized farmers can be attributed to many factors such as natural calamities, failure of crops, exploitation by moneylenders, lack of adequate supplementary income and low level of education, besides lack of effective intervention by the State in the form of measures like land reforms. It is a socio-economic phenomenon rooted in structural inequalities and an unjust and inegalitarian social and economic order. Acute poverty, indebtedness and illiteracy are among the debilitating factors which have combined to compel the farmers to take the extreme step of committing suicide, which is, needless to say, a blot on the nation's collective conscience.

Addressing unemployment in the rural areas is crucially important in ameliorating the economic conditions of the people. Governments, both at the Union and the State levels, have adopted a multi-pronged approach and several initiatives have been launched, in recent years, to address the challenges in our rural economy. Developmental programmes like, the *National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Sampooran Grameen Rozgar Yojana, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Aam Admi Bima Yojana,* if implemented sincerely, the misery experienced by the rural poor can be mitigated substantially and they can be extended an acceptable quality of living. The political leadership, the bureaucracy and the media have vital roles to play in this. What is important is to ensure the honest implementation of such well-meaning programmes and their effective monitoring. No one should be permitted to misuse the resources or benefit from the distress of the rural poor—a message that as a conscientious activist and columnist, Shri Sainath, has been passionately attempting to emphasise and plead for several years now.

It is essential that our farmers are not left to the vicissitudes of uncertain weather, uncertain financial resources and uncertain markets. For this we have to take effective measures to transform agriculture into a sustained income-generating activity, as we had accomplished through the First Green Revolution.

In order to increase productivity and employment generation in the agriculture sector, it is imperative to bring about structural changes, of which Land Reforms are the primary need, as support prices and provision of cheap credit do not help beyond a point. Experiences in West Bengal and Kerala, have shown that providing the poor with access to land through honest implementation of land reform legislation always act as a major catalyst for growth and for addressing rural poverty as it gives the peasants an identity of their own. Such institutional reforms in ownership of agricultural land can really unleash the peasantry's productive forces, increasing the food grain production and thereby help address poverty and distress experienced in different parts of the country.

The State of Andhra Pradesh has a great potential and is well-equipped to move forward on the path of progress. It has bountiful natural resources and is endowed with fertile land and conducive agro-climatic conditions. Nearly 75 per cent of its area is covered by the river basins of Godavari and Krishna and their tributaries. Agriculture happens to be the main occupation of about 62 per cent of the people in Andhra Pradesh, which is also the largest producer of rice in India. Yet, it is also a fact that the agriculture sector here too is afflicted with several ills and faced with great distress, and it is a matter of greatest sorrow that many poor farmers have committed suicide. Obviously, much more remains to be done before we can give a new deal to the rural poor.

What is of critical importance is that everyone involved treat the farmers' issue with utmost sincerity and commitment, viewing it as a national challenge and a national responsibility, rather than adopting a partisan attitude. Our farmers and the agrarian sector as such, should not be allowed to become a victim of the politics of confrontation and intolerance and the peasants should not be used as a pawn in their game of sectarian politics and the matters concerning them should be viewed as vital national issues and the political parties should work together to address them as most urgent national issues to be dealt with a sense of priority and in a national perspective. As the title of Shri Sainath's celebrated book, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought*, points out, paradoxically in our country, there are situations when the competing interests look forward to benefiting from the distress of our common people. Confrontational politics and the visibly competitive journalism are doing enormous damage to our body polity today. Only with the efforts of well-meaning individuals and institutions can we hope to correct those aberrations in the culture of politics in the country today.

Friends, to my mind, the newspapers and journalists can play the most crucial role in articulating the concerns and problems of the people in our villages and small towns by sensitizing the Government and the politicians

as well as the civil society about the problems faced by the rural masses. Journalists, especially those with the vernacular media, can not only help in broad-basing our politics, but can also play a major role in the overall development of the weaker and the marginalised sections of our country and in projecting in a responsible manner, the problems of rural India. A vibrant and free Media has a duty to create awareness among the people by disseminating the relevant facts, which is a pre-requisite for the smooth working of democracy and for the cause of good governance. The representatives of the Media should contribute effectively and meaningfully in this process through their writings and objective reporting for building an inclusive and egalitarian society. This is particularly so in the case of the print media, including the vernacular newspapers, whose reach is substantially wider. Some of the largest selling newspapers and magazines in India are in the regional languages.

With regard to the developmental schemes, the media has to play a key role by highlighting the deficiencies, if any, in the schemes as also cases of mal-administration and corruption and by acting as a watchdog over the implementing agencies. I have said time and again that I consider journalism as a great mission, and not merely as a profession. It is a mission to uphold and promote certain cherished values and lofty ideals and eschew pessimism and mere negativism. Such a noble mission calls for commitment and courage of conviction of the kind demonstrated by those who laid the foundation of a free Press in India during the years of our struggle for freedom. I am sure many more in the profession will draw inspiration from Shri Sainath and today's Award winners and will contribute meaningfully to bring to light the numerous problems faced by our rural people and thereby help create awareness among the people about the need of the socio-economic advancement of a significant section of our people who need proper attention, and all our support, so that they may also be the beneficiaries of the developmental planning, without which the nation as a whole can never prosper.

Today's Media, especially the mainstream Media, if I am not misunderstood, is, more preoccupied with urban issues and lifestyles of the rich and the affluent. This urban bias manifest itself in varied ways, whether it is in the print or in the electronic media, depending upon their owners and managers. It seems that responsible and committed journalists find themselves out of tune. One of the most respected members of the Fourth Estate, Shri Khushwant Singh, observed recently:

> Proprietors of newspapers could better meet the challenges posed by the electronic media. All it needed was to fill their pages with pictures of scantily-clad starlets or models, recipes for exotic foods, vintage wines and gossip. ... The hard truth about Indian journalism is that proprietors matter, editors do not; money counts, talent does not.

For such a market-driven media world, problems of the common man or of the rural poor are not matters of serious concern, and as such they do not find space in many newspapers. It is said that the marketing managers and not the Editors decide the policy of many newspapers. This is undoubtedly a matter of grave concern. The silver lining is that there are sensitive and committed journalists like Shri Sainath who have worked tirelessly to write on issues of rural distress in the Media. As the Rural Affairs Editor of *The Hindu*, Shri Sainath, has been rendering great service to the Nation. It would be extremely desirable that leading newspapers in this country have a Rural Affairs Section exclusively covering the problems confronted by the millions of our underprivileged citizens residing in those areas so that they too get proper attention. The several awards conferred on Shri Sainath for his unwavering articulation of the rural cause and the Award instituted by Shri Sainath himself for emerging journalists striving to bring to light the problems of rural Andhra Pradesh, I am sure, will help the mainstream Media to realize the urgency of the matter.

Before I conclude, I would like to compliment Shri Sainath once again for his abiding commitment for the welfare of our rural masses as is evidenced by his instituting this Award for rural reporting, the laudable objectives of which, I trust, will be achieved, sooner than later. I extend my heartiest felicitations to all the journalists who have been conferred the Award for highlighting the problems of rural Andhra Pradesh through their columns. I am sure their praiseworthy efforts will help in serving adequately the legitimate causes they have expressed and in finding solutions to the deep-rooted problems faced by the rural people of our country in general, and Andhra Pradesh in particular.

Thank you.

PARLIAMENT, PEOPLE AND THE MEDIA*

I feel greatly honoured and privileged to have been invited to deliver the Eighth Memorial Lecture instituted in honour of one of the great Media personalities, Late Shri Pranabesh Sen. I heartily compliment the Pranabesh Sen Smarak Samiti for organizing this Lecture Series and I take this opportunity to pay my respectful homage to his memory.

Shri Pranabesh Sen belonged to the first generation broadcasters, who are credited with the very establishment of a sound broadcasting culture in our country. His command over the language and lucid style of presentation endeared him to millions of listeners. His inspiring commentaries during the 1971 Indo-Pak war boosted the morale and roused the passion of *our jawans*. He used his immensely popular programme, *'Sambad Parikrama'* to raise many burning issues of the times. The creative genius that he was, Pranabesh Sen realized the instant appeal of the visual Media later in his career and shifted to Doordarshan where he produced a television serial titled *'Nikat-Door'* depicting the then prevailing conditions of rural Bengal, which again was very well received by the viewers.

Late Pranabesh Sen had the rare distinction of having worked in all the three forms of Media: he started with the print Media, later shifted to broadcasting and ended his career with the visual Media. He was indeed a multifaceted personality whose concern for the welfare of the common man endeared him to all. Throughout his life, he remained committed to the trials and problems of the ordinary people of our country and he laid emphasis on their empowerment for exercising their democratic rights. Keeping in mind his deep commitment to people's welfare and the role of the Parliament and the Media in this regard, I have decided according to the suggestion of the *Samiti*, to speak on 'Parliament, People and the Media', as the people expect that both the institutions, the Parliament and the Media, would work for the strengthening of our democratic institutions constituted by the people themselves.

In a parliamentary democracy, Parliament, People and the Media are as they should be, integrally linked. Thomas Carlyle famously wrote: 'Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but in the Reporters' gallery

* At the Eighth Pranabesh Sen Memorial Lecture on *Parliament, People and the Media*, Kolkata (12 January 2009).

yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all', which signifies the pivotal link in the relationship between Parliament and the Press. The Parliament, as the supreme representative institution, embodies and reflects the hopes, aspirations and urges of the people and the Media serves the people as well as the provider of news, which must be based on truth, and by informing people about the working of parliamentary institutions, namely, the activities of their elected representatives and about the issues raised and discussed and most importantly about laws made in Parliament, apart from the accomplishments and lapses of the executive.

The Founding Fathers of our Constitution had well recognized the primacy of the Parliament as also the importance of the Media in our polity. Their endeavour was to facilitate good governance through the institution of Parliament and transparency and probity at every level of the system, through an array of mechanisms, including a free and vibrant Press.

Freedom of access to sources of information, freedom of publication and freedom of circulation, which are essential components of freedom of the Press, have to be ensured in a parliamentary democracy. The Indian Constitution has recognized this fundamental precept in our constitutional framework. Freedom of speech and expression has been guaranteed as a fundamental right to all citizens, excepting for 'reasonable restrictions' provided for in Article 19(2). Article 105 extends constitutional protection to freedom of speech in Parliament. The freedom of the Press is inherent in the fundamental right to freedom of speech and considering the importance of communicating Parliament to the people, the Parliament itself enacted the Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Act, 1977, providing the privilege of publishing substantially true proceedings in Parliament without being exposed to any civil or criminal action. To my mind, by respecting each other's jurisdictions, roles, responsibilities and privileges, the Parliament and the Media can develop a healthy and cooperative relationship, which is vital for strengthening the very structure of our parliamentary democracy.

Democracy is the most preferred political system the world over and the people occupy the central position in that. However, for democracy to remain effective and successful, a mature, responsible and well-informed electorate, who can make conscious choices, is essential and it is the Media, which, if I may say so, has the great responsibility in providing relevant and accurate information to the citizens so that they are duly equipped with correct information to enable them to make informed judgment while exercising their rights.

In spite of myriad problems and many aberrations, we take pride that India is the largest working democracy in the world. The Indian Parliament represents over a billion people, practicing various religions and belonging to different cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups. To fulfil the expectations of such a multi-cultural and diversified population, it is essential to have very close interaction between Parliament and the people and the Media has a major and an inevitable role to play in this regard.

During the past six decades the Parliament has enacted many important legislations of far-reaching importance with a view to cater to the needs of the people and creating new rights for the citizens. Today's resurgent India would not have become possible without such sustained parliamentary endeavours. Despite these achievements, it must be acknowledged that we have much more to do to uplift the poor and the dispossessed, the distressed and the disadvantaged. And we can do more if we parliamentarians can function in a more committed and responsive manner.

It is a matter of great concern that in recent years, some very disturbing trends have emerged in the functioning of our Parliament. There have been instances of recurrent disruption of the proceedings of the Houses of Parliament, corruption by some elected representatives, and criminalization of politics in general. Disruption of parliamentary proceedings and disorder instead of discussion and debate not only result in wastage of huge amounts of public money but more importantly in the loss of credibility of the representative institutions. The Media naturally, and rightly so, have highlighted such disruptions and disorderly scenes in our legislative bodies. It has also widely reported on several corruption cases involving elected representatives. Yet, it must be borne in mind that Parliament itself took note of these unfortunate events and for the first time in its history, expelled some members on the basis of the Media coverage of their acts of misdemeanour and malfeasance, of course, after providing opportunity to the concerned Members for self-defence.

But in this context, what is important is to keep in mind that if the Media chooses to paint all members of Parliament and the entire political class with the same brush as detractors of democracy, then in my humble view, they will be doing a great disservice to our parliamentary system and indeed to our political system as a whole. It will inevitably result in the people losing faith in democratic institutions and weakening the polity itself and will make them cynical, which will be most disquieting. I feel effective communication about Parliament in the Media is central to maintaining people's faith, trust and interest in parliamentary institutions.

Unfortunately, the Media coverage of Parliament has transformed significantly in recent years. With the newspapers growing in size and number,

parliamentary activities were expected to get larger print space but it is a matter of concern that today very inadequate if not minuscule, space in the newspapers is allotted for parliamentary coverage. What is more distressing is that even this sparse coverage of Parliament is primarily limited to the disruptions and disturbances in parliamentary proceedings. It is but rarely that we get to see Media reports on the important debates that are held in Parliament and on the numerous reports of our Parliamentary Committees. It will be worthwhile to undertake a study about the proportion of space provided to serious issues discussed in Parliament and to matters that have a crucial bearing on the future of our democratic polity. One notices with dismay, how inadequate was the coverage given to the recent debate on the 'Motion of Confidence'. While liberal space was provided to the most condemnable act of producing wads of notes during the crucial stage of the discussion which not only condemned Parliament, but also the very ethical basis of our national behaviour, the structured debate that preceded that despicable episode received scant attention of the Media. One of our very eminent journalists and also a respected parliamentarian, Shri Kuldip Nayar, bemoaning this fact, has said:

> 'Serious stories, which include the Parliament proceedings, do not make the grade. The Media has come to believe that people do not want to read anything which makes them think. Today, the print Media is suffering from a mad disease which has played havoc with our newspapers. It is 'the tabloid syndrome.'...This shallow, unthinking attitude gets reflected even in the news stories and articles that are carried in the papers. ...Many years ago Parliament was the biggest news. Both Houses were covered extensively with a weekly round-up of highlights of the proceedings. Now the Press does not devote more than a column, TV networks pay hardly any attention.'

Whatever may be the reasons for the poor coverage of Parliament, I feel that parliamentary proceedings should be provided the required space, as the people have the right to know what is happening in the highest representative forum of the country. It is in this context that I took the decision to set up the Lok Sabha Television Channel in 2006. Apart from the live telecast of proceedings of the House during the session, it has been showing a number of value-added and informative programmes in an effort to take our Parliament closer to the people, for whom it exists and functions. Parliamentarians now have got another platform through this Channel to share their views on varied contemporary issues of national and international relevance with a larger audience, when they are invited to participate in the specially conceived programmes. I am glad to see that our endeavour of taking Parliament and parliamentarians closer to the people is being very much appreciated in different quarters.

It is one of the well-recognized maxims of democracy that it cannot function effectively without a free Media. The Media is a natural ally to a democratic society as it is through the Media that the people are made aware of the functions of the polity. A direct relationship should exist in all democratic societies between the structure and organization of communications and the character, tone and content of political expression and discourse. In fact, this political communication is of vital importance, for it plays an important role in informing the voters, in forming public opinion, in focusing on critical public issues and in exposing the administration's acts of omission and commission.

The Press in India in early years of independence had shown its commitment to truth and to transparency in a remarkable way. The initial years after independence saw the emergence of a feature that had not been there before: ownership of some newspapers passed from founders and editor-publishers to commercial concerns. For some years, though the interest of some of the owners did shift more to the revenue earned by the papers, the editors were left free to determine what the editorial policy would be. That was an age of great editors, who virtually set the standards of impartiality and independence that became an integral part of the print Media.

The recent past has witnessed phenomenal growth of both the print and the electronic Media in our country. With various positive and promising developments in the realm of mass communication in recent years, the Indian Media also achieved remarkable growth in a highly competitive environment. However, it seems that this growth, rather than being utilized to reinforce democratic system and values, is unwittingly, getting involved in projections, which are weakening our polity and the society in different ways. It is being watched with concern that the Media is more being influenced by the compulsions of market competition to cater to the needs of particular sections, driven by elitism, commercialization, and sensationalism, thereby becoming susceptible to inducements of corruption and political patronage. The fierce battle for capturing larger market share has affected the print and the electronic Media and has turned the serious business of journalism into catering to rank consumerism, giving rise to what can be described as competitive journalism, with the tendency to provide what people want to see or read rather than what they need to see or read.

The role of the Media to inform, to educate and, to some extent, entertain has gone through a sea-change in the last two decades. Regrettably, a large section of the Fourth Estate of democracy is behaving like a business house, (of-course, with some honourable exceptions), with emphasis on earning more revenue often at the cost of professional ethics and democratic values. In sections of the Press, now more importance is given to the Marketing Manager

than to the Editor. It is said that in some newspapers, the Marketing division decides what will 'sell' the paper in terms of news and how they will do it. The price-war, the cut-throat competition and the reader-friendly marketing schemes to grab the audience is a common scene today. If one watches the competitive 'Breaking News' with so-called viewer participation through SMSs being introduced on Indian television channels, one will be left wondering about the extent of trivialization of our Media ethics and values. There have been many instances of 'trial by Media' also, where sustained and lopsided reporting has built up public pressure hampering the cases under trial. Such practices make us worried about the direction we are taking. Playing to the gallery and the mindless pursuit of higher TRP ratings seem to have overtaken a large section of the Media, weakening our polity and society. Views of the Media professionals are often presented as news, thereby obliterating the difference between News and Views and, in the process, undermining the truth and the ethics of the profession.

The mainstream Media, is now more preoccupied with urban issues and lifestyles of the rich and the affluent and the 'Page 3 People'. Sometimes, we find that syndrome overtaking page 1 also. Despite the fact that 70 per cent of our population live in villages, the Media reportage has increasingly been showing a distinct urban bias. The main concerns, issues and problems of people from cities find much larger print page and screen presence than those of the rural areas. In this context, the vernacular Media that have a sizeable circulation and good credentials can play a significant role as educators and disseminators of information. When we pay a tribute to the memory of Shri Pranabesh Sen every year, you must remember that Shri Sen always remained committed to raising the issues of the people throughout his life. He realized that the social responsibility the Media has is towards the people and that the rural India needs them much more to get their voices heard.

Unfortunately, the Media is also not free from the corroding influence of corruption. Sometimes investigative journalism also becomes selective. Any designedly partisan reporting, is anathema to the basic concept of ethical journalism. Dr. Harish Khare, an eminent journalist, has written:

> 'Because of our six decades of democratic give and take and the gradual deepening of the democratic spirit, the democratic structure is able to absorb the daily assault on the legitimacy of politics and politicians...Our own Media leaders need to reflect on their own institutional arrogance and their own frailties; more than that, the democratic discourse has a responsibility to ensure that it does not create conditions which may tempt the non-democratic forces and voices to step in.'

I am sure that well-meaning sections of the Media, which for long have worked towards the eradication of social, economic and political ills from our society, are keen to see that their freedom and power are exercised with a sense of responsibility. Accuracy and fairness, the hallmarks of the working of Media, should never become a casualty. Distortion of news — deliberate or accidental — must be avoided at all costs, so as not to lose their credibility among the readers. Mahatma Gandhi wrote once:

> 'The sole aim of journalism should be service. The newspaper is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countryside and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control. It can be profitable only when exercised from within.'

In a civil society, every profession should have a code of ethics accompanied by a viable mechanism to enforce the same. It hardly needs to be emphasized that the Media gets its influence and nourishment by ethical professional conduct, which means concentrating on well-laid journalistic codes, guidelines and ideals of Media responsibility.

Today we have a fractured polity in the country which is almost totally governed by politics of confrontation, if not hatred of each other. The country is overtaken by intolerance, divisiveness, corruption, violence, conflict and disrespect for democratic dissent, which are seriously vitiating our political life, as well as social cohesion. Such confrontational politics has made caste, creed, language, region and religion divisive issues, seeking to mould public opinion around them and sections of our political spectrum is depending on the same to get political advantage by emphasizing on issues that divide the people than what unite them. Section of our society are beginning to ignore our most cherished national values such as secularism, socialism, respect for pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance and co-existence. In such a scenario, a responsible Media has a very crucial role to play. It is expected of it to do everything possible to help reinforce among our people the values of respect for our democracy and feeling of inclusiveness, so that our democratic polity and national fabric are strengthened.

While proclaiming to be independent and non-attached, the Media should not project partisan points of view in the name of dissemination of views, rather than news, which should be factual and objective. News connotes what has happened and is to be accurately reported. Except for some honourable exceptions, today the newspapers' or the TV Channels' political leaning and political predilections are well-known and those obviously affect dispassionate presentation of news and also views.

Friends, we often refer to the Media's role in making our Parliament and Government accountable to the people and to our democratic institutions. The time has come to raise the issue of accountability of the Media also to the people and to our democratic institutions. It has been seen that the Media are quick to present a negative or biased picture of a parliamentarian or a leader on the slightest pretext. A corrigenda or errata, carried in small print in an insignificant manner — at times not even that — can hardly repair the damage already done. The popular image or reputation is all that a politician has and a careless report can do immense harm to well-meaning and sincere persons. In this connection, it is worthwhile to recall what Gandhiji said:

> 'If newspapers realized that it was their duty to educate the people, they could not but wait to check a report before publishing it. It is true that often they have to work under difficult conditions. They have to sift the true from the false in a short time and can only guess at the truth. Even then, I am of the opinion that it is better not to publish a report at all if it has not been found possible to verify it.'

As our Media is by and large fearless and unbiased, my appeal to them is that they should avoid indulging in sensationalism and, in this context, I would like to refer to one most disturbing trend which we all witnessed during the recent terrorist attack in Mumbai. While the electronic Media deserve full compliments for their fearless coverage of the dastardly attack, many questions have been raised about the kind and the extent of reporting that was done during the crisis. Much criticism has come about, including from respected Media persons and concerned citizens, on the competitive coverage presented by the Media at the cost of national interest and even the safety of the citizens caught in the attack and the security personnel engaged in the rescue. It needs reiteration that sensationalism and hyperbole are no substitute for sensitivity and professionalism. Chitra Padmanabhan's observations in the reputed newspaper, *The Hindu*, recently, merits quoting here: ... 'television news ... is very often packaged as histrionic performance, dressed up in hyperbole and melodramatic mien, serenaded by lethal sound effects and evocative background scores, invariably from films. .... news comes with a lethal decibel level and at a hammering pace guaranteed to quicken your pulse. There is no bigger entertainer than news milked as reality TV.... it is somewhat unnerving to think that what we earmark as news and information and 'reality' could be television's flight of fantasy, extracting the seed of emotion from a human dilemma and converting it into a spectacle to be viewed vicariously, not experienced with concern.'

Friends, during the protracted freedom struggle and in the early years of Independence, the media worked as the bulwark of democracy by helping to consolidate our freedom and democracy. In spite of weakening and compromise with high standards, the media is still looked upon as the

watchdog of our parliamentary democracy, which has to be preserved with sincerity and commitment and should not be undermined in any manner for commercial interests. I am sure everybody will agree that half truths and untruths are injurious to the health of any democratic set-up and indeed of the nation as a whole.

I have always believed that the Parliament and the media need to treat themselves as partners who should work together for the benefit of the people, to develop political and socio-economic conditions in a manner that is consistent with democratic principles. Both serve the people in different capacities and have the common goal of the welfare of the people. They must take each other's criticism in a positive manner as these criticisms enlighten them about their shortcomings and provide them opportunity to improve their functioning in the interest of democratic values and traditions. Let us remember that if there is no democracy, there can be no freedom of the Press and its concomitants as we saw during the period of Emergency. As Shri Vir Sanghvi, the noted Editor, has said while receiving the 1st Lokmanya Tilak Award for Excellence in Journalism:

'After politics, media is the second most powerful profession. But unlike politicians who are some way accountable, media is power without accountability. ... journalism cannot merely be a business. In one sense its a business but if you enter into journalism only to make money, then you are betraying the ideals of journalism.'

Friends, while stressing on the imperative of responsible reporting on the part of the media, I must accept the position that members of Parliament and our representative bodies too need to do much introspection on their role and functions, especially in the context of the disillusionment of the people with their overall conduct and demeanour. Sadly, the image of Parliament and its members, rather the political class as a whole, reached its nadir in the wake of the unprecedented shameful events that happened on the floor of the Lok Sabha on 22 July 2008. If urgent corrective measures are not taken proactively by all concerned, it will spell disaster for the future of our democracy. Without people's trust and confidence, no system can survive for long. To redeem the people's trust and to consolidate our hard-won freedom, all stakeholders of democracy, especially the Parliament and the media, have to work in concert.

On 30 January 1919, in a message to the Editor of *The Independent*, a new English daily proposed to be launched from Allahabad, Mahatma Gandhi wrote:

> 'In wishing you success in your new enterprise, I would like to say how I hope your writings would be worthy of the title you have chosen for your journal; and may I further hope that to a robust of

> independence you will add an equal measure of self-restraint and the strictest adherence to truth? Too often in our journals as in others do we get fiction instead of fact and declamation in place of sober reasoning. You would make *The Independent* a power in the land and a means of education for the people by avoiding the errors I have drawn attention to.'

Today, no one will doubt the need to uphold the parliamentary system for the success of democracy in the country, in our region and in the world at large nor will anyone doubt our ability to run a democratic system in the country. As an eminent British columnist Bernard Levin, speaking on the *'Paradoxes of democracy'*, observed, 'if the democracy of India falls, the end of democracy itself will be in sight'! We cannot afford to take even minor threats to democracy lightly. To quote Levin again... 'remember that every nation that has fallen from democracy into tyranny was at one time only remotely in danger, and we would do well to think of ways that can strengthen our defences.'

I am of the firm opinion that there is no alternative for us but to strengthen the structure that we have. Our common people have already identified themselves totally with the system. It is for all of us together to address the imperfections and shortcomings, within the framework of the system. Since it is out of our Parliament that the leadership that runs the affairs of our country emerges, we have to ensure that people with commitment and dedication to the cause of the people come in to it and have the opportunity to actively participate in working the system which will have its due impact on the quality of living of the people.

Only in the hands of a united and an eternally vigilant citizenry will our democracy be safe. A great responsibility is thus cast upon all of us in sustaining Parliamentary democracy, our freedom and democratic rights, and, more than anything else, in sustaining our people's faith in the institutions of our democracy. If we all faithfully discharge those responsibilities, nothing can ever undermine it.

I am sure all of you share my view that journalism is more a mission than a simple occupation. It is a mission to uphold and promote certain cherished values and lofty ideals, which calls for commitment and courage of conviction of the kind demonstrated by those who laid the foundation of a Free Press in India during the years of our struggle for freedom. The special position and power that the media enjoy today in our country's democratic structure, should be used to strengthen democracy in every possible way, than otherwise and that will be the best tribute that we can pay to the memory of pioneering and committed media persons like Late Shri Pranabesh Sen.

I hope, my well-meaning observations, will be taken in the right spirit by my friends in the Media. I can assure you all that I yield to none in my commitment to the Freedom of the Press. I thank once again the Pranabesh Sen Smarak Samiti for giving me an opportunity to share my views with you all. I wish them all success in their endeavours towards the promotion of the philosophy and ideals of Shri Pranabesh Sen.

Thank you.

VI

HONOURING NATIONAL LEADERS AND ACHIEVERS

MRINAL SEN: THE STORMY PETREL OF INDIAN CINEMA*

It is indeed a great honour for me to have been asked to release the memoirs of Shri Mrinal Sen, who has been rightly described by the Editor of the Book herself as the phenomenon of the cine-world. Some have described him as an extraordinary film-maker; to some others, he has been the stormy petrel of the Indian cinema. In his own right, Shri Sen has been recognized as a many splendoured personality. His breadth of knowledge, pan-Indian outlook, broad and incisive world-view, perceptive understanding of men and matters, artistic sensibility, sensitivity to the society of which he is an intimate part, have all been universally recognized.

Mrinal Sen made his first feature film in 1953, which he soon tried to forget. His next film, *Neel Akasher Nichey* (Under the Blue Sky), earned him local recognition, while his third film, *Baishey Shravan* (Wedding Day) was his first film that gave him international exposure. After making five more films, he made a film with a shoe-string budget provided by the Government of India. This film, *Bhuvan Shome* (Mr. Shome), finally launched him as a major filmmaker, both nationally and internationally. *Bhuvan Shome* also initiated the 'New Cinema' film movement in India. His next few films were overtly political and earned him the reputation as a Marxist artist. This was also the time of large-scale political unrest throughout India, particularly in and around Kolkata. This phase was immediately followed by a series of films where he shifted his focus and instead of looking for enemies outside, he looked for the enemy within his own middle-class society. This was arguably his most creative phase and won him a large number of international awards.

Mrinal Sen never stopped experimenting with his medium. In his later films he tried to move away from the narrative structure and worked with very thin story lines. After a long gap of eight years, at the age of eighty, he made his latest film, *Aamar Bhuban*, in 2003.

During his career, Mrinal Sen's films have received awards from almost all major film festivals and he has also received a number of personal honours.

* At the release of the memoir of Shri Mrinal Sen, *Always Being Born*, New Delhi (2 August 2004).

He received the Padma Bhushan and had been a nominated member of the Indian Parliament from 1998 to 2003. The French Government awarded him the Commandeur de l'ordre des Arts et letters (*Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters*), the highest honour conferred by the country. In 2001, the Russian Government honoured him with the Order of Friendship. He has also received a number of honorary Doctorate degrees from various Universities. Mrinal Sen was the President of the International Federation of the Film Societies. He also served as the member of International Jury at various film festivals.

If someone were to ask me who or what is this book about, I would have found it difficult to answer. I will be trivializing its content if I were to say it is about Mrinal Sen. In fact, there is very little about Mrinal Sen, the individual, in the book. It is about the world of Mrinal Sen – about Kolkata, about India, about the world of cinema, about the great events and people who shaped the world of his time, and about the world of the present generation. It is in his humility that the book is being described as his memoir. It is, in fact, a memoir of our times presented in his own inimitable, 'frugal but profound style'. There is probably no event of significance of the previous century that does not find a mention in his book, all seen from a fresh and brilliant perspective. Who can miss the significance of his description of the city of Kolkata as the city mercilessly maligned and dangerously loved or his description of the 1940s as one of war, famine, riot, partition, Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

So much about the world we left behind is described through those single words and their essence is encapsulated in the familiar expression: *The Cannibal Time*. Has there ever been any other time in recorded history when men hurt their fellow men with such passionate intensity as did during the forties of the last century – some in the name of religion, some in the name of race, some in the name of nationality and some even in the name of civilizing the uncivilized?

It has been through the medium of his films that the world got to know, Mrinal Sen, the genius. The book tells us the essential details about the processes and stages through which he graduated from an amateur director to that of international fame. Sometimes, through the pages of the book he also takes us through his movies. While reading the book you may feel that some of the movie scripts are unravelling before you once again, and with the added advantage of knowing more about the context and circumstances under which such great movies were made, you get to understand both the movies and their creator better. He claims that he became a maker of films by accident. How impoverished the world of films would have been but for that accident?

The pages also reveal the non-conformist in him, the revolutionary in him, the suave, affable writer in him and the freedom-loving and socially sensitive Indian in him. The pan-Indian nationalist in Mrinal Sen also comes out through these pages. There is no space for hatred in his heart, no space for narrowness, for violence, for communal, parochial or divisive feelings in him. The stories already known to the world through the movies and writings and the revelations made through the pages of the book also bring out the world citizen in Mrinal Sen.

Friends, the value and relevance of the message conveyed through the pages of this book, through his movies, or through his interaction with the people of all hues from across the world, or through that simple but direct message of wishing a *tough time* to those who were aspiring to be in the film world till they made a choice between *playing safe* and *taking chances*, is not confined to the borders of our country or to the time in which we live. They are of universal relevance and for all times to come.

Somewhere in the book, he expresses his wish if only *life was a dress rehearsal and I could do it all over again*! I am sure, there will be thousands including me, all across the world, to share that wish for Mrinal Sen so that the world could have more of him. He doesn't appear to be burdened by the numerous awards and accolades that came after him, all these years, from the world over. To quote Tennyson, he is still *'wearing all that weight of learning lightly like a flower.'* I wish him continued good health and long years in his endless pursuit of excellence. With these words, it is my pleasure and an honour to release this memoir.

Thank You.

It is indeed a matter of honour for me to have the opportunity to pay my tributes to the Late Thiru Murasoli Maran. As a journalist, as an editor and publisher, as a creative dialogue, screen play and script writer and producer-director of several movies, as an accomplished author in his own right, as a parliamentarian, as a Union Minister handling important portfolios, and, above all, as an authentic articulator and defender of our democratic values and the federal principles, Thiru Murasoli Maran has left an indelible imprint in the pages of our country's history.

Thiru Murasoli Maran's innings in Parliament was one of the longest. When I came to the Lok Sabha in 1971, he had already been a member for one full term. From 1967 till his passing away, he continued to be a member, dividing the period almost equally between the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha making a mark in both. He led his Party in both the Houses with remarkable efficiency and registered the voice of his Party emphatically on all major issues of the time, always adhering to the established parliamentary norms.

Thiru Murasoli Maran's administrative skills, leadership qualities, deep understanding of the issues of our time, and his world-view came out prominently during his stint in the Government on different occasions. Always open to new ideas and new approaches to issues relating to development, Thiru Maran provided effective leadership to the different Ministries he headed from time-to-time. He had a deep understanding of the economic and trade issues of our time. I shall never forget the active help that he, as the Hon'ble Minister for Commerce, rendered for the setting up of a Special Economic Zone for Gems and Jewellery at Kolkata, when I had approached him as the Chairman of West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation. I recall my meeting with him at his residence where he received me warmly and granted my request overruling some technical objections raised by his officers. Today, the project sanctioned by him is a reality and is one of the most important projects of our country. On the date of its inauguration, I missed him most and paid my respectful tributes and regards to his memory. I can never forget his extremely proactive help and quick decision, which alone enabled the project to be completed.

* At the function to release the Commemorative Stamp and First Day Cover on Shri Murasoli Maran, Chennai (17 August 2004).

Thiru Murasoli Maran's persuasive arguments in support of the trading interests of the developing countries gave him world attention during the Ministerial Meeting on WTO at Doha in November 2001. Representing India at Doha, he was chiefly instrumental in resisting the developed nations' attempt to widen the WTO's scope by bringing within its purview issues like labour standards and environment-issues that could have been used to the detriment of the trading interests of the developing countries. He could see through the dangers for the developing world, hidden behind the attempt to link non-trade related issues to issues of trade and development. He stood his ground in Doha steadfast in his conviction that the developing countries deserved a better deal in the world trade regime. In fact, his voice was echoed throughout the world for the spirited defence he made of the interest of the developing world even at the risk of getting isolated before the Big League. As some learned observers stated at the end of the Doha meeting, 'Thiru Maran's voice was India's voice there and India's voice was reflective of the voice of the developing countries.'

While supporting economic liberalization, Thiru Murasoli Maran wanted to ensure that our country's interests were not compromised in the process. He was convinced that policies that could contribute to jobless growth and capital flight could undermine the foundations of our economy, particularly hitting the poor the hardest. He had his own vision for India — an India industrially strong, confidently dealing with the rest of the world from a position of strength.

He advocated reforms with a human face. While advocating industrial growth he ensured that it was not done at the expense of the traditional and small-scale industries. The personal interest he had shown in promoting the leather industry in the country is a case in point. Convinced that the survival of thousands engaged in the industry, mostly living on the fringes, was closely linked to the sustenance of this industry as a viable economic activity, he took several initiatives to safeguard their interests.

Friends, that was the kind of social sensitivity of the man we are honouring today. In his untimely passing away, the country has lost a visionary leader, an able administrator, a creative writer, an erudite scholar and, above all, a fine human being, and the State of Tamil Nadu has lost one of her most distinguished sons. The Commemorative Stamp that is being released today is only a small token of our country's gratitude for the dedicated service that he has rendered.

It is said that the final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him, in other men, the will and the conviction to carry on. In his son, we have another born leader, to continue the good work that his father had been doing. I wish him and the rest of the Thiru Maran's family and to the people

of this great State, the very best of future and progress. I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my gratitude to Dr. Karunanidhi for giving me this honour to associate myself with this function. My very best wishes are always with him and his colleagues in all his endeavours in the service of the country.

Thank You.

SVETOSLAV ROERICH: AN INTEGRATOR OF CULTURES*

It is indeed a matter of pleasure for me to be here and to have the opportunity to pay my respectful tributes to the memory of one of the greatest creative geniuses of the last century, Mr. Svetoslav Roerich. He had combined in himself the artistic creativity of a very high calibre, of a talented painter and of an unusual quest for the spiritual fulfillment and enlightenment. Though he was born in Russia, he died as an Indian. He felt at home equally in India as in Russia. When the Russian Federation is honouring him, through a function like this, it is paying its tributes to one of its greatest sons, as also to the time-tested Indo-Russian friendship.

If Indo-Russian relationship occupies a place of pride in the world today, the credit for it goes as much to our respective country's leadership as to several well-meaning and committed individuals like the Roerichs. Our relationship is not something confined to the realms of the Government or the particular parties in power. It is between two peoples and is reinforced by certain shared values and ideals.

Svetoslav Roerich's father, Nicholas Roerich, whom the famous Dostoyevsky had described as the 'consciousness of beauty' was a highly accomplished artist, philosopher, scientist and a great humanist. His mother was also on a high intellectual pursuit. Her writings on Orientalism and Indology are very valuable additions to the subjects. It was these high artistic and intellectual skills that Svetoslav Roerich inherited. His works fully reflected the culture, art and philosophy of India and, in many ways, the enduring human values.

Roerichs were indeed, deeply in love with India, particularly with the Himalayas and its Valley. They knew India and her cultural ethos as much as they knew of their homeland, Russia. The Kullu Valley has been their home for several decades. In the case of Svetoslav Roerich, that love went much beyond aesthetics – it took a deeper personal turn when he found his life's partner in Devika Rani, another extremely gifted individual. My home

* At the inauguration of the ROERICH Memorial Museum and Arts Club, organized by the Russian Centre of Science and Culture, New Delhi (25 October 2004).

State of West Bengal has a special reason to be proud of them both—Devika Rani was the grandniece of one of the most distinguished Indians, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.

Friends, when an artist shifts base, it is not just the person who moves, but he carries with him the richness of the culture he represents, and his work from the new place is bound to reflect the synthesis of the cultures he gets to be exposed to. It is difficult to separate a creative artist from the culture of his surroundings. They merge with it and identify themselves with it. This is what happened with the Roerichs. Once in India, they identified themselves totally with the culture of India and with its people. They did not stop with it — through their life's work, they enriched our art and culture substantially. Oriental studies, particularly Indology, would have been much poorer but for their deep interest in it and committed endeavours to understand and enrich them. The Centres of art and research established by them in different parts of the country, stand as a testimony to their love for this country, its culture and its eternal values.

Art and culture are beyond the boundaries that human beings erect. This is the message we need to imbibe from the life of the Roerichs. It is not given to all artists to be loved in so many lands. But in the case of the Roerichs, wherever they went they earned a place for them in the hearts of the people. Through their work of art and literary creations, they had actually touched the sensibilities of the people everywhere. In Svetoslav Roerich's message, 'Every day do something better than you did yesterday. .... There can be no better resolve than to follow the path of self-perfection and self-development....', lies the secret for excellence and perfection in life. It was this pursuit of perfection that made him one of the greatest artists of his time.

In his call to the people everywhere to strive for 'beautifying their lives' carrying the 'message of beauty into every heart and every home', the sum and substance of the life he lived making the lands he belonged, is reflected. It is, therefore, a fitting tribute to the memory of this great human being, an integrator of cultures, that we are opening this Museum and Arts Club, in New Delhi, this evening. I am grateful to the Russian Federation and its Cultural Centre here for giving me this opportunity to be associated with this function today.

Thank you.

M.P. VEERENDRAKUMAR: ARTICULATING PEOPLE'S VOICE*

It is always a matter of pleasure to be in this beautiful State of Kerala. All the more so to be here and to have the opportunity to associate with a function like this organized in honour of Shri M.P. Veerendrakumar, on his reaching an important milestone in the service of this great organization, the *Mathrubhumi* Group of publications. I join the *Mathrubhumi* family and the other well wishers in extending my hearty congratulations to Veerendrakumarji for the remarkable leadership he provided to this unique institution rightly named the *Mathrubhumi*, all these years. I am given to understand that there is no facet of modern Kerala's life not touched by *Mathrubhumi* in some way or the other.

The quarter of a century that he has led it has seen *Mathrubhumi* consolidating itself as a commercially viable venture, taking care of the all-round interests and welfare of the employees and without compromising on its fundamental social commitment. Both his leadership qualities and professionalism came into full play in taking the organization he headed, into new heights, diversifying into new vistas in both the publication business as also into the newly emerging areas of entertainment. In doing all these, Veerendrakumarji demonstrated vision, understanding, a high degree of sensitivity to the Malayalis' taste for quality and an uncompromising commitment to the broader national values like secularism, democracy and social justice.

Friends, it is not given to everyone to involve in so many different activities at the same time and come to make an imprint on every area. Veerendrakumarji has done it all these years. He is at once a social and political leader of standing, a seasoned Parliamentarian, a creative writer of remarkable eminence, an entrepreneur of exceptional skills, an administrator of rare acumen, and a professional manager of modern outlook and originality.

When you interact with him you do not get to see any trace of these unusual accomplishments. His unassuming nature and very endearing approach are his own trademarks. The recognition he has earned from across

* At the function to felicitate Shri M.P. Veerendrakumar, M.P. and former Union Minister, Kozhikode, Kerala (24 November 2004).

the State and the large number of awards and accolades he has received and the love and respect he commands from the people of Kerala in general and the *Mathrubhumi* family in particular and the reputation and goodwill he enjoys across the country, vindicate these admirable qualities about him. The fact that he has not allowed his political preferences to interfere with the style of functioning of this widely circulated newspaper and the other publications attests to his professionalism.

It is not a mere coincidence that, historically, several of those who were actively associated with this publishing-group were also known for their great literary skills. Many of them made a mark on the intellectual life of Kerala. This also demonstrates yet another remarkable quality of *Mathrubhumi* and that is the climate of freedom of expression that it provides. Veerendrakumarji himself is the best example today. His own literary and intellectual accomplishments are enough to inspire others working with him to aspire to reach such heights in their own ways.

All *Mathrubhumi* publications, though vernacular in character, demonstrate a national perspective. It is a quality it has inherited from the early days of its origin. Its history in its first quarter century is interwoven with the history of the last quarter century of our freedom movement. Its leadership had identified itself totally with the nationalist causes and had paid a very heavy price for it during those critical phases of the freedom struggle. It is that same kind of nationalist spirit that the post-Independence leadership of this prestigious publishing group carried forward with uncompromising commitment.

Mathrubhumi's leadership has always demonstrated an unusual sense of history and social commitment. It is this quality that helps you to continue to trudge on the path laid by great men like K.P. Kesava Menon and K. Kelappan, Karoor and Madhavan Nair, in its early years. It is the same quality that Veerendrakumarji demonstrates in everything he does. It is indeed a good fortune that *Mathrubhumi*, a newspaper group of such great repute and tradition has been having the benefit of the guidance of such a remarkable person of great knowiedge, experience and eminence.

It is said that 'newspapers are the schoolmasters of the common man'. Today when you look at the State of Kerala in its entirety, what stands out are its level of literacy, its high level of political consciousness, its urge for transparency in public life, its quality of living, its experience in socio-economic reconstruction, its rich cultural life, consciousness of its people on factors like environment, science, hygiene, health-care, etc. I am sure, in all these achievements, the widely spread newspaper networks in Kerala would have played a significant role. As you are aware, Kerala has the distinction of being the State with the greatest proportion of newspaper readers in India.

Having a highly informed population is one of the greatest assets of a democracy. We must, however, not forget that only in a democracy can free press flourish unhindered. The Press, therefore, has a great responsibility to help build up people's respect for democratic institutions in the country. In a society like ours, where diverse religious, linguistic, cultural and regional groups coexist, it is important that the Press plays a balancing act, keeping the larger national interest in mind. A responsible Press has to respond against wrongs and injustices of all kind. Whenever freedom is endangered, when human beings are degraded, when poverty and squalour are experienced by masses, when you see a lack of integrity in public life, when corruption eats into the vitals of a society, whenever you see that the leaders are not showing the right path or otherwise having shown the right path not trudging on them, I would expect a responsible Press to respond to it. As an eminent British journalist observed: 'if dark days are coming – days in which freedom would not necessarily be taken for granted – the last line of defence would be the Press.' This weaponless army, the Press, according to him, is 'the greatest defender of democracy'. This is the lesson that we all need to learn from the history of *Mathrubhumi* and from the lives of those who led this great institution through more than eight decades, both in good and bad times.

A learned man observed that a good journalist should have 'the vision of the future and of a philosopher, the passion for truth of a seeker and a great sense of justice, equity, dignity and compassion'. Veerendrakumarji is endowed with all these qualities in abundant measure along with a great degree of leadership qualities. That is what makes *Mathrubhumi* a great institution. I am sure, he will continue to lead *Mathrubhumi* in the service of the people of Kerala, adhering to high standards of journalistic ethics, professionalism and social commitment. I extend him my very best wishes, good health and long life to continue with his endeavours. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to *Mathrubhumi* for giving me this opportunity to be here and to associate myself with this function this evening.

With these words, it is my pleasure to inaugurate this felicitation programme this evening.

Thank you.

LALCHAND HIRACHAND: A VISIONARY ENTREPRENEUR*

It gives me great pleasure to be with you all here and to associate myself with the Birth Centenary Celebrations of Late Shri Lalchand Hirachand, one of the doyens of the Indian Industry, a remarkable public figure and a Parliamentarian of eminence. From sports, culture, theatre, literature, education, social work, construction work, industry and politics, there was practically no area of Maharashtra's life with which he was not associated. And on every area that he came to be associated with, he left an indelible imprint of his personality. I am grateful to the organizers of this function for giving me this opportunity to pay my tributes to his memory.

Shri Lalchand Hirachand's name figures along with the other great names of Indian Industry like G.D. Birla and J.R.D. Tata. Today we can only marvel at their vision, farsightedness, their remarkable achievements and their contributions to the economic development of our country.

Shri Lalchand Hirachand was a renowned entrepreneur with great acumen and foresight and an effective parliamentarian. Apart from the steps taken by him in establishing various educational institutions in Maharashtra, his initiatives in setting up green field sugar factories in 1933 and the Hindustan Aircraft Factory in Bangalore, which was transformed into today's Hindustan Aeronautical Limited after the Government took it over, in the pre-Independence years, were indeed very commendable. He also developed the Premier Automobiles into one of India's largest integrated car company and undertook huge construction projects like bridges, dams and barrages across the country. It is perhaps a little known fact about him that his construction business had spread to other countries also. I am told that he had built over fifty bridges in Iraq alone.

A democrat at heart and a true nationalist, he utilized his varied skills and resources for the progress and welfare of the country. Endowed with a rare sensitivity and social commitment, he contributed significantly to the task of our nation-building in the previous century. He was one of those who strongly believed that it was only through industrialisation that India could move forward towards progress and prosperity and that in this endeavour, the private entrepreneurs had an important role to play.

* At the Birth Centenary Celebrations of Shri Lalchand Hirachand, Mumbai (4 February 2005).

A forceful orator, he made his mark both in the Rajya Sabha, and prior to that, in the pre-independence Bombay Presidency Vidhan Sabha. Lalchandji's meaningful expositions on a wide spectrum of issues, particularly on economic themes, enlivened and enriched the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha. His speeches in the Upper House were characterized by depth of knowledge and incisive intellect and were laced with dignified wit and humour. As a member of the Vidhan Sabha, he spoke eloquently both for the sugarcane growers and for the sugar mill owners, visualizing them as important forces for the economic and industrial progress of the people of the region.

Friends, if today we can claim to have built up the foundations for a strong and self-reliant economy, it is thanks to the efforts of pioneers like Shri Lalchand Hirachand. It is a matter of pride for all of us that India now stands on the threshold of a remarkable economic breakthrough. Our economy has accumulated enough potential for vigorous growth in all sectors. We now have thousands of enthusiastic entrepreneurs, particularly small businessmen and producers. There are innumerable possibilities for the growth of modern industries in our country today.

Though India's reform programme has been described as rather cautious, our experience of the past few years has helped us to create a broader social and political consensus on such reforms. As India is a democratic and pluralistic country, the consensual efforts assume added importance. Though differing viewpoints have been articulated on the economic reforms programme, there is an underlying convergence of views on the urgent need to address the issues of poverty, unemployment and socio-economic iniquities. Not many would disagree that in conditions of large-scale poverty and socio-economic disparities, it is necessary for the State to play an interventionist role and address the concerns of the disadvantaged. Today, our economy offers tremendous potential which has to be harnessed through discipline and dedicated efforts. The path shown by great entrepreneurs like Lalchandji can continue to inspire us. It should be our collective endeavour to reinforce the productive forces in the economy to achieve our laudable objective of building a strong, prosperous and self-reliant economy. I am confident that the economic reforms, if implemented properly and with a human face, can unleash the dynamism and creative enterprise of our people and give a chance for the Indian genius to blossom.

Friends, we have a tradition of great industrialists and entrepreneurs who have contributed immeasurably to the freedom movement and in consolidating the gains of our hard-won freedom. In post-Independence India, many of them have played a crucial role in national development and in creating wealth for the country. For them, the means have been as important as the end. Shri Lalchand Hirachand was one such veteran industrialist who upheld the high values and traditions of our business and industry.

Today, on the occasion of the Birth Centenary Celebrations of Shri Lalchand Hirachand, I pay my tributes to this visionary entrepreneur, distinguished parliamentarian and social reformer. I thank all those associated with this function for giving me the opportunity to be here today and wish them success in their commendable endeavours towards the furtherance of the ideals and values for which Shri Lalchand Hirachand strived all through his life.

Thank you.

KAIFI AZMI: A PROGRESSIVE POET*

It is indeed a matter of privilege for me to have the opportunity to associate with this function, organized to honour late Comrade Kaifi Azmi, and to pay my tributes to his memory.

Comrade Kaifi Azmi was a many-splendoured personality. To some he was a highly-rated romantic Urdu Poet, to a few he was a progressive non-conformist writer, to many others he was a revolutionary social activist, a Communist to the core, a champion of the working class, an ardent advocate of secular, socialist values and composite nationalism in our country. He was indeed all these and much more.

Through his literary works, particularly through his poems, through his efforts in mobilizing the creative writers, through his espousal of the cause of the working class and the down-trodden and through his social activism, Shri Kaifi Azmi has left an indelible imprint of his personality on the history of our times. The story of the transformation of a young village boy who was sought to be groomed into an Islamic Theologian, into a progressive poet, with a cosmopolitan outlook and a revolutionary zeal, is, in fact, highly inspiring.

It was Kaifi Azmi's dream to change the exploitative social order and to bring about a just order in the country. The die-hard optimist that he was, a revolutionary zeal remained in him all his life. His more than six decades long association with the Communist Movement reinforced in him the hope that one day the toiling masses in the country would get their dues and that a socialist society will become a reality. He used to say, 'I was born in an enslaved India, have lived in an Independent and Secular India and I will die in a Socialist India'.

One of the founders of the Progressive Writers Association and later its President, his role in mobilizing the creative minds in the country and for providing them a platform for expressing themselves, channelising their energies into socially useful lines has been significant. His own contribution in infusing greater vigour into the cultural component of the Left Movement in the country is, perhaps, without parallel.

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* At the function to name a road in New Delhi after Shri Kaifi Azmi, New Delhi (22 February 2005).

He was acutely concerned about the injustices and iniquities in our society. Not only was he concerned, but also he was among those ready to go that extra-mile to ameliorate those conditions. His poems and other literary works were his tools for drawing the attention of the world-around to those realities. As a literary critic observed, 'the intensity of emotions and the spirit of sympathy and compassion towards, the disadvantaged sections of our society are the hallmarks of his poems' and 'they had a way of entering your heart and residing there', as his daughter Shabana puts it. To my mind, the most distinctive aspect of his writings was their social dimension. There was always a very clear and direct message for the society in his writings.

His poem, *Doosra Banvas* (*The Second Banishment*), written in the backdrop of the developments in Ayodhya in late 1992, revealed the contradictions in the deeds of some misguided elements in the name of religion and strongly affirm his faith in the basic principles of secularism and human compassion.

Friends, the road that we are naming in the Capital after Kaifi Azmi today will have a special symbolic meaning. It is an extension of his own life's work - of connecting people. All his life he worked for connecting people and communities and not to cast them apart. There was no room for narrow thinking or pettiness or hatred in his heart. He was a great champion of composite nationalism in our country. It is only appropriate that our capital city has also come forward to recognize his contributions. I congratulate the Chief Minister and the Government of Delhi for their thoughtful initiative. This adds to the long list of awards and recognitions he has earned through a lifetime of dedicated work. I would also like to thank Smt. Barkha Singh, Member of the Delhi Legislative Assembly and Mr. Ashok Singh and the *Yade Kaifi Society* for organizing this function and the students of the Anubhav DPS Siksha Kendra for their active participation here. I am happy to note that an Award also has been instituted in his memory by the Society.

As an eminent poet and critic described 'Kaifi Azmi will always be present in his poetry as a bulwark against despair and defeat, a beacon of courage and hope'. He will continue to live in the hearts of people everywhere, committed to the cause of a free, peaceful, secular and a socialist world order.

Thank you.

It is a matter of great honour for me to be associated with this evening's function and release the book, *The Vision of Ray*, a collection of cine-posters and other film graphics by Satyajit Ray and Sandip Ray. I am particularly delighted to see here today several distinguished artistes closely associated with Shri Ray's films and other works. Subir Banerjee, Uma Sen, Madhavi Mukherjee, Sharmila Tagore, Soumitra Chatterjee and Sandip Ray are very much a part of the Satyajit Ray saga. For all of us who have been unwavering fans of Shri Ray, it is indeed a moment of joy and nostalgia to be here on this occasion. I am grateful to Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Shri Amar Singh and to *Pratikshan* for providing me this opportunity to associate myself with this function and to pay my tributes to Shri Satyajit Ray.

In my own humble ways, I have also been trying over the years, through the Forum of the Ray Society of which I have the privilege of being the President, to carry forward the legacy of Shri Satyajit Ray. One of the objectives of the Society has been the restoration of Ray Films. With the initiative and support of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, we have succeeded considerably in our efforts to restore many of his films which are all masterpieces. There is also a proposal to set up an archive for the preservation of Ray Films for which the Government of West Bengal has been approached.

Friends, when you speak of a legend, that too someone who influenced your understanding and appreciation of the way you look at a medium like cinema, it is but natural that you tend to get a bit emotional. I have always wondered as to how one can describe the matchless excellence of Satyajit Ray. If anyone personifies many-splendouredness, it is him, and that too not in film-making alone! Universally acclaimed director, master story teller and litterateur, outstanding cameraman, brilliant composer, reputed graphic artist, accomplished designer of costumes, film sets, credit titles, publicity material, posters, book jackets, renowned illustrator and typographer—perhaps not many in the contemporary world of cinema had such total control of his work as Shri Satyajit Ray had, and no one combined in himself such rare talents as he did. And what is equally admirable is that each and every facet of his films had the distinctive imprint of his multi-faceted personality.

* At the release of the book *The Vision of Ray*, New Delhi (15 March 2005).

It will not be an exaggeration if I say that Shri Satyajit Ray strode like a colossus on the world's cinematic stage. His was a towering presence – literally and figuratively – in contemporary cinema. Film festivals across the world applauded the master craftsman for his timeless classics and aficionados used to throng the halls to get a feel of the Ray legend.

Between 1955 when *Pather Panchali* caught the imagination of the world and 1991 when Shri Satyajit Ray bid adieu with *Agantuk*, he came to be acknowledged as one of the greatest film-makers of all time. It is a magnificent tribute to his creativity that his very first film is celebrated as one of the best films ever made! It is equally fascinating that fifty years after it was made, *Pather Panchali* still evokes the same intense emotions, testifying to Satyajit Ray's mastery of all aspects of film craftsmanship.

During his illustrious career, Satyajit Ray made twenty eight films, two short films and five documentaries. Each of his works, though highly varied on themes, reflects the humaneness of Ray, his concerns, his compassion, and most of all, his sensitivity. The intensity of his films is unmatched and is marked by creativity at its best. Shri Satyajit Ray once said that 'the best technique is the one that's not noticeable' and he did it to perfection, though the world of cinema noticed with awe and admiration the genius behind such subtlety. He elevated the art of film-making to new heights and in the process brought Indian cinema to the global theatre, if I may say so. Though set in Bengal, and predominantly made in Bengali, his films, with their universal appeal, won rave reviews from the world over, transcending all geographic and linguistic barriers. He was, as Dilip Basu wrote, 'a product of his times and cultural heritage as well'.

Those close to him say that Satyajit Ray's first love was music and then cinema, followed by drawing. No wonder, his brush was as creative as his camera. He took lessons in drawing from Kala Bhavan from the great Nandalal Bose and was also inspired by Binode Bihari Mukherjee. His eye for detail and the minutiae is evident in the many sketches, posters, handbills and glass slides he used to make. Today, each one of these sketches and other Ray memorabilia is a treasure, not just for his fans but also for anyone interested in film-making. I compliment *Pratikshan* for this unique publication which also carries promotional materials by Sandip Ray.

In the early years of his career, Shri Satyajit Ray had to face many hurdles but the passion for cinema made him surmount all the troubles. As he once said, 'To me, it is the inexorable rhythm of its creative process that makes film-making so exciting in spite of the hardships and the frustrations'. The higher aesthetics of film-making challenged his imagination and he revelled in scripting poems on the wide screen; his canvass was too broad for many

of his contemporaries even to comprehend. It is that finer aesthetics and creative genius that sets Shri Ray a class apart. That his was verily a multi-faceted personage added lustre to his skills. Satyajit Ray once spoke eloquently about cinema when he said: 'In the immense complexity of its creative process, it combines in various measures the functions of poetry, music, painting, drama, architecture and a host of other arts, major and minor. It also combines the cold logic of science with the subtlest abstractions of the human imagination'. And no film-maker in modern times combined all these attributes in one person than Satyajit Ray himself. No wonder that numerous Awards and accolades, including the *Bharat Ratna, an Oscar* and the prestigious *Legion de Honneur* from France, came after him. His life's work, in fact, stands above all those Awards.

I am sure that *The Vision of Ray* will bring his millions of admirers joy as they leaf through its pages. With these words, I have great pleasure in releasing this unique volume.

Thank you.

ARJUN SINGH: A FAR-SIGHTED STATESMAN*

It gives me great pleasure to be with you here today and to associate myself with the Amrit Varsha Mahotsav Celebrations of Shri Arjun Singhji who is completing fifty illustrious years in active politics. It was only last month that Arjun Singhji was bestowed with the Indian Parliamentary Group's Outstanding Parliamentarian Award for the year 2000 for his rich and varied contributions to our public life and his remarkable parliamentary career. Today, by presenting this *Abhinandan Granth*, titled *Paksha-Pratipaksha*, we are once again honouring a national leader who has dignified our political and parliamentary system in more ways than one.

This Abhinandan Granth is a collection of important speeches delivered by Shri Arjun Singh in the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly during the period 1963 to 1979. I understand that this is the third Volume of a series covering his distinguished public life. The range of issues and depth of ideas contained in this Volume reflect his profound understanding and deep insight into a wide spectrum of social, economic and political challenges before our society.

Friends, it is nearly five decades since Arjun Singhji was first elected to the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1957. Right from those early days, he has contributed substantially towards enriching our public life and has excelled as a Legislator, Minister and Chief Minister and Leader of Opposition in Madhya Pradesh, as Governor of Punjab, Member of both Houses of Parliament, Leader of the House in the Lok Sabha and Union Cabinet Minister holding important portfolios.

It goes to his credit that he has handled challenging situations, combining firmness, diplomacy, sensitivity and compassion. As Agriculture Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Arjun Singhji was instrumental in establishing the first Agriculture University in the State in 1964 and as Education Minister he constituted the Higher Education Grants Commission in the State. These measures testify to his farsightedness in laying special emphasis on education as a means to ameliorate the conditions of our people. During his Chief Ministership, Madhya Pradesh witnessed noticeable progress in diverse areas.

* At the Amrit Varsha Mahotsav Celebrations of Shri Arjun Singh, Union Minister of Human Resource Development, New Delhi (27 April 2005).

Arjun Singhji became the Governor of Punjab at a critical time in our nation's history. With his renowned negotiating skill, he played a key role in bringing about the historic Punjab accord between late Rajiv Gandhi and late Sant Longowal. Needless to say, this landmark Accord played a crucial role in restoring normalcy to Punjab after a long troublesome period.

As the Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Shri Arjun Singhji has left an indelible imprint of his personality on key areas like education, human resource management and development. Convinced that our educational system should play an important role in preparing the youth for the task of radical reconstruction of society through peaceful change, he is doing his utmost to address the imperfections and inadequacies of our education system and revamp it to suit our conditions and ethos. Of particular interest to him is the importance of secular education in promoting and preserving our national heritage and the unity and integrity of the country.

As a parliamentarian, Arjun Singhji has carved out a niche for himself with his learned speeches and effective interventions in the Houses of Parliament. A renowned orator with an abiding commitment to parliamentary traditions and conventions, he has always forcefully articulated his views on numerous issues facing our society and polity. His rich experience, immense intellectual capabilities, and active participation in the proceedings of Parliament have enriched our political and parliamentary discourse.

It is widely acknowledged that Shri Arjun Singh has dignified our public life through his stellar contributions in diverse fields. A national leader of long standing, an ardent patriot and a highly accomplished administrator, he has ceaselessly striven over a span of over five decades to strengthen the fabric of national integration, to fight fissiparous tendencies and thereby to establish an inclusive society. Transparency and citizen-oriented administration have been the hallmarks of his public career. He has rightly observed that, 'citizens should come forward to make useful suggestions to the government with a view to bridging the communication gap between the Government and the people and enabling the administration to discharge its duties in keeping with the aspirations of the people'.

A champion of secular and humanistic values and the socio-economic uplift of the deprived and the downtrodden, Arjun Singhji has stood by his convictions with steely determination. He has always showed utmost respect for the sensitivities and aspirations of the rich diversity of the Indian mosaic and our composite culture. For him secularism is not merely a dogma or a concept but an article of faith. In his own words, "every religion is an ideal fusion of faith, belief and righteousness". His vision is that of a strong and united India, free from the virus of sectarianism, narrow-mindedness and communalism.

Arjun Singhji's perceptive understanding and analysis of diverse issues and challenges before the nation find expression in the pages of the Abhinandan Granth. What is discernible to the readers through the pages of this volume is that even during those relatively early years, Shri Arjun Singh articulated his concerns and views with a rare courage of conviction. His clarity of thought, oratorical skill and exceptional command over the language find best expression in the speeches that are included in the publication. His profound statement, in one of his speeches that : 'Only those who rise to the occasion will meet with success and derive the satisfaction of having done their duty while those who are dithering and doubtful will get lost in the vast ocean of life without a trace', not only conveys his enormous sense of history, but, in many ways, brings out the visionary leader in him. In Arjun Singhji, we have a gifted leader who is self-assured, warm-hearted and who has risen to the occasion every time a challenge came his way.

I am thankful to the organizers of this function for inviting me to be here today and to have the opportunity to associate with this function to present the Abhinandan Granth to my good friend and valued colleague Shri Arjun Singhji, with whom I have had the benefit of interacting closely for several decades. I congratulate the Indian Writers' Association and the Shri Arjun Singh Abhinandan Granth Samiti for bringing out this Commemorative Volume when Shri Arjun Singh is entering his 75th year and completing fifty years of his political life. I am sure that political leaders, legislators, academics, media personnel and the public at large would find it a veritable treasure house of ideas and information on those crucial years of not just Madhya Pradesh but the nation as a whole.

I convey my greetings and felicitations to Shri Arjun Singhji on this occasion and wish him a long and healthy life and many more fruitful years in the service of the country.

Thank you.

SATYAJIT RAY: A LEGEND IN HIS OWN LIFE-TIME*

I am delighted to be here this evening and to have the opportunity to associate myself with the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the making of Satyajit Ray's timeless classic *Pather Panchali*. It is a befitting tribute to the memory of that great genius Satyajit Ray that the organizers of the Asian Cinema Festival has decided to make *Pather Panchali* as the centre-piece of this year's festival. I understand that four of his other masterpieces — *Seemabaddha, Mahanagar, Sonar Kella* and *Charulata* — will also be screened during this Festival. I would like to heartily compliment the Osian's Cinefan for their ceaseless endeavours in promoting the cause of Asian cinema and for facilitating the creation of an enlightened audience for Indian and Asian Cinema. Asian cinema has cast its spell on the global theatre since long. Many of our leading film makers are well known to film aficionados the world over. And leading this illustrious list of legendary film makers from Asia is our own Satyajit Ray. Friends, Satyajit Ray was not just a legendary film-maker. I would suggest that not many in the world of cinema had such total control of every aspect of film-making. He was at once a universally acclaimed director, master story teller and litterateur, outstanding cameraman, brilliant composer, respected graphic artist, accomplished designer of costumes, film sets, credit titles, publicity material, posters and what not ! All his films bore the distinctive stamp of his multi-faceted personality. Most of all, his films reflected his humaneness, his concerns, his extreme compassion and his rare sensitivity. That is why his films, even today, evoke such intense emotions.

Satyajit Ray caught the imagination of the world through his very first film *Pather Panchali* itself, way back in 1955. He made his last film *Agantuk* almost four decades later in 1991. During his exceptionally remarkable career, he crafted twenty-eight films in all, two short films and five documentaries. What is special is the fact of his very first film being still celebrated as one of the best films ever made. Today, Satyajit Ray is counted among the greatest film-makers of all times and several of his films find a pride of place among the greatest films ever made. That in itself sums up the magnificence of his creativity. Like many-many others, I too have been an unwavering fan of Ray. In fact, in my own humble ways, I have endeavoured to promote the

* At the inauguration of the Osian's Cinefan Asian Film Festival, New Delhi (20 July 2005).

legacy of Satyajit Ray through the Forum of the Ray Society of which I have the privilege of being the President. One of the objectives of the Society, founded in 1993, has been the restoration of Ray Films. With the initiative and support of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and with assistance from the Ford Foundation and archives of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences we have succeeded in restoring 17 of his 36 films, each one a classic in distinct ways. We also propose to build a special vault designated for Ray films and to set up a Ray Museum in Kolkatta, where eventually all his films will be restored and preserved.

I would also like to take this opportunity to compliment Prof. Dilip Basu, who is also the Founder-Trustee and the International Coordinator of the Ray Society for his painstaking efforts in restoring the Ray films and for making them available for viewers here. But for such committed endeavours, these great masterpieces could have been lost for ever.

I once again express my gratitude for giving me an opportunity to be here this evening, marked by reverential nostalgia for a celebrated film-maker.

Thank you.

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN: A TRUE *LOK NAYAK**

I am thankful to the Lok Nayak Jayaprakash International Study Centre for giving me an opportunity to be here and to pay my tribute to the memory of Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the greatest Indians of modern history. He was one of our greatest freedom fighters, a revolutionary, a rebel against all forms of oppression and injustice, a person with progressive thinking, a champion of the working class, an ardent advocate of true socialist principles, and a *Lok Sevak* and a *Lok Nayak* at the same time. Perhaps no other leader in the second half of the 20th Century acquired the kind of respect and acceptability across such a cross-section of people, as Jayaprakash Narayan did. His stature as a great awakener and an inspiring motivator for achieving the democratic rights of the people was unmatched.

An uncompromising patriot and a democrat to the core, Jayaprakash Narayan is, justifiably, credited with having won India its second freedom. Perhaps there is no parallel to the story of the transformation of *Lok Sevak* Jayaprakash Narayan to a *Lok Nayak*. In this process of transformation, the space that JP occupied in the hearts and minds of hundreds of millions of our people comes second only to that of Gandhiji. As an analyst observed 'He wielded no power or authority, had no wealth, but innate goodness, compassion and patriotism. Yet all those with power and wealth bowed before him.'

He was among the leaders of our freedom struggle whose vision and imagination had also gone into the shaping of post-independent political democracy in the country. He was as much a product of that saga of selfless struggle and sacrifice as was among the path-finders of that mass-struggle to throw out the imperialist forces from the country.

JP gave everything to the country and sought nothing in return. As another analyst observed, he was 'the best Prime Minister India never had'. At one point, in the early years of our freedom, JP was considered among the surest possible to succeed Nehru as the Prime Minister, a calling that was to come after him again in later years. But he chose the more enduring path of service to the people without the trappings of political power, because, to quote him 'not because the ugliness of politics repelled me, but because the attraction

* At the Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan Week Celebrations, New Delhi (7 October 2005).

of the new politics of *sarvodaya* drew me.' He joined the *Sarvodaya* movement with the conviction that it had the potential to make a qualitative impact on the lives of the marginalised masses. All his life he remained sensitive to the concerns of the common man, of the working class and the underprivileged. It was this uncompromising concern and sensitivity that made JP, the *Lok Nayak*.

His own contributions in giving a socialist orientation to Independent India emerged out of his conviction that only through progressive policies and emphasis on the uplift of those who were deprived, together with achieving the rightful position of the working class, could India achieve its true goal of political as well as economic and social progress. In fact, while actively engaged in the freedom struggle, he was among those who was also searching for an appropriate framework to build a new India. Later when he renounced active politics and turned to the *Sarvodaya* movement, JP firmly believed that political freedom was a *fait-accompli* and it was time to divert his attention towards achieving social and economic development of our teeming millions. He firmly believed that there can be no real freedom without the development of rural India. His concept was of the total, integrated development of India, combining the virtues of Gandhian philosophy and the modern Western notions of democracy, through participatory democracy. It was out of this conviction that his new concept of 'Total Revolution' emerged. Its essential focus was on empowering the people by ensuring a dignified existence to them.

JP's total revolution was not something directed against any individual or party in particular. It was a totally pro-people idea, a concept, I would say, which evolved out of his conviction that only when democracy touched the lives of everyone could it attain legitimacy.

His 'Total Revolution' was to bring about a systemic change in the socio-political climate in the country, characterized by corruption, political defections, politics of expediency, electoral malpractices, *etc.* JP was as much opposed to abhorrent social practices as he was to politics without morality. In India of his dreams, there was no place for casteist and communal politics.

He was acutely concerned about the plight of the backward classes. As Prof. Vivekanandan has observed: 'Indeed after Mahatma Gandhi, if any leader had brought the question of social reform with great force to the fore-front of national politics in India, it was JP.'

JP's 'Total Revolution' was born out of his uncompromising patriotism, a holistic view of democracy, and the centrality of people in it. It was his concern for the country and the people that impelled him to rebel against the powers that sought to mutilate the democratic political order.

In June 1974, JP said he could no longer tolerate the sight of a country, 'racked by hunger, rising prices, corruption... and oppressed by every kind of injustice.' He, therefore, believed that the way out was only through 'Total Revolution'. His advocacy of the same was not for capturing political power for himself but to create conditions for fulfilling the unfulfilled promises of freedom.

Like Gandhiji, JP also believed that it was possible to bring about change in the country without sacrificing one's values. It was this sense of purity about him, his incorruptibility that endeared JP to everyone who came in contact with him. His presence was mesmerizing. He could relate to the common man and the mighty with equal ease. After a half an hour meeting with JP just two years before his passing away, a Western observer wrote:

> ...We had a memorable experience when we visited J.P. Narayan, one of the great figures of the twentieth century Indian politics, and a man held in the highest respect throughout India. He was an old man and unwell, with a kidney ailment requiring weekly dialysis. Nevertheless, when I met him in his modest but comfortable home, I was deeply impressed. He had an air of serenity and incorruptibility; there was something saintly about him, not a common quality in Western politicians ... . I left feeling that we had met a great man.

Tomorrow, it will be twenty six years since Jayaprakash Narayan left us. His name still evokes reverence and admiration from across the country. He was first and foremost a champion of principled politics and a rebel against the politics of expediency. When we are celebrating the memory of this great man and a great Indian, if we are reminded of these principles also, his life's labour would not be lost and JP's voice will continue to reverberate on our socio-political horizon, significantly touching upon the lives of the people, particularly the deprived and the disadvantaged among them.

Thank you.

JAWAHARLAL DARDA: A MULTI-SPLENDOURED PERSONALITY*

I deeply value this opportunity to associate myself with the release of the Commemorative Stamp in honour of Late Jawaharlal Dardaji by Respected Uprashtrapatiji, this evening.

Jawaharlal Dardaji was indeed a many-splendoured personality, serving the country in various capacities. He was a veteran freedom fighter, eminent legislator, reputed administrator, distinguished journalist, and a committed social activist. At a very young age of seventeen years, he plunged himself into the freedom struggle. He was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and gave all his time and energy to the national liberation movement and launched a 400-mile long *padayatra* to disseminate the message of patriotism. He was instrumental in setting up the Indian National Army at Yavatmal and Dardaji was actively involved in the Bhoodan Movement of Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

Shri Jawaharlal Darda recognized that the media has a very important role to play to educate the masses about the issues of the times. It was this realization of the pivotal role of the media in nation-building that led Dardaji to launch the *Nave Jag* in Marathi in 1947. The success of this experiment led to the launching of the Marathi weekly *Lokmat*. It is indeed a tribute to Dardaji's sagacity and visionary leadership that today the *Lokmat* group of publications has a readership exceeding one crore. He always ensured that high journalistic standards should be maintained and the values that he stood for should be the guiding factors.

Shri Jawaharlal Darda was also an eminent and respected legislator, having been a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Council between 1972 and 1995. He effectively utilized the forum of the Legislative Council to forcefully articulate the concerns of the people and seek redressal of their grievances. His administrative acumen was put to good use as a Minister in the Maharashtra Government and he held key portfolios like Energy, Industry, Irrigation, Health, Food and Civil Supplies, Sports, Youth Affairs, Textiles and Environment. These were prominent segments of governance, which

* At the function to release the Commemorative Stamp on Shri Jawaharlal Darda, New Delhi (2 December 2005).

were of particular interest to Dardaji. He brought to bear the distinctive imprint of his personality on all these important portfolios.

I compliment the Department of Posts on bringing out a Commemorative Postal Stamp in memory of this great Indian. With these words, I pay my respectful homage to the revered memory of Jawaharlal Dardaji. I am sure that he would always be remembered for his sterling qualities and his varied contributions towards enriching our polity and society.

Thank you.

NETAJI AND ANDAMAN ISLANDS: LODE STARS OF FREEDOM*

It is indeed a poignant moment for all of us who have gathered here today. On the one hand, we have assembled here to commemorate an event which was a turning point in the history of India—the Declaration by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on this very day sixty two years ago of the Andaman Islands as the first Indian territory to be freed from foreign rule. On the other, the catastrophe wreaked on this beautiful islands and their wonderful people in the devastating Tsunami of last December is something which none of us has been able to reconcile with so far. Today, as we celebrate the Anniversary of that historic announcement, let us pay our humble tributes to those who sacrificed their lives in the cause of our freedom as also to those who lost their lives in last year's natural calamity here in this beautiful island territory of India.

Natural calamities are something we cannot prevent. But, we can plan, prepare and prevent large-scale loss of lives and property, and mitigate the miseries of our people. I would like to take this opportunity to compliment Lt. Governor Prof. Ram Kapse, the Administration and the people of Andaman and Nicobar Islands for their forbearance in their hour of crisis and for their steadfastness in striving to tide over the tragedy of the Tsunami. Netaji, who made the striking call, "give me blood, and I shall give you freedom", will be proud of the courage and fortitude with which you have faced the wrath of nature and your admirable determination to overcome your emotional and psychological trauma.

The islands of the Andaman and Nicobar group had played a very crucial role in the struggle for our Independence. During the British days sending someone to the Andamans was synonymous with sending him to a natural jail. Many patriots and heroes of our freedom movement had spent years of their life in their prime age in the Cellular Jail here. Till independence, these Islands were known to the outside world mostly as 'penal settlements' for convicts. For the British, this was the safest jail, far away from the shores of the mainland India, in deep waters from where the 'transported prisoners' could neither make any attempts to flee nor their associates could establish

* At the Anniversary Celebrations of the Declaration by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose of Andaman and Nicobar Islands as Free Territory in 1943, Port Blair (30 December 2005).

any contacts with them. The Cellular Jail was a mute witness to the inhuman torture inflicted upon thousands of our freedom fighters. Many of them never came out alive from there. That jail, a national monument today, stands as a symbol of our national resistance, of our valiant struggle against not just imperialism but all that stood against the dignity of man as also as a grim reminder of the indescribable sufferings of freedom fighters who were imprisoned there for years together, in the cause of our freedom.

It was the misuse of these islands for undermining our freedom movement by incarcerating our leaders there that made Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's declaration of these islands, as the first Indian territory to have been freed from foreign rule, on this day in 1943, of great symbolic value for us. He had renamed the Andaman as *Shaheed*, in memory of the martyrs, and the Nicobar as *Swaraj*. In the stirring words of Netaji: "Like the Bastille in Paris, which was liberated first in the French Revolution, setting free political prisoners, the Andamans, where our patriots suffered, is the first to be liberated in India's fight for Independence. Part by part, Indian territory will be liberated, but it is always the first plot of land that holds the most significance." Thus, everyone of you can be proud of being a part of a great Revolution in Indian history.

Many of you would recall that during the fiftieth year of India's Independence, a grateful nation, led by the Hon'ble President of India, honoured the surviving freedom fighters and the widows of those freedom fighters who were kept imprisoned in the Cellular Jail and a Commemorative Coin and a postal Stamp on the Cellular Jail were released on the occasion. The Cellular Jail is now a National Memorial and a visit to Andamans is incomplete without paying homage at this symbol of our national sacrifice and resistance.

We celebrate the Anniversary of declaring Andaman and Nicobar Islands as the first territory freed from foreign rule and also to pay our respectful homage to the heroes of the Indian National Army for playing a crucial role under the leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Netaji brought a new sense of commitment and dynamism into the liberation movement and he decided about the most effective way of attaining Independence. The revolutionary in Netaji took the Indian freedom movement beyond the frontiers of India which shook the British empire and at the same time it left an indelible imprint of his magnetic personality on the nation and his people.

It was only Netaji who could organize and mobilize the Indian National Army beyond our territorial borders to generate the true spirit of *Swaraj*. It was thus that he called upon our people: 'every patriotic Indian must advance towards the field of battle. Only when the blood of freedom-loving Indian begins to flow will India attain her freedom.' It was that spirit of sacrifice and determination that makes millions in the country today regard him not just

as a statesman, but as a vivacious, daring and dynamic national hero for whom no sacrifice made in the service of the freedom of the country was too big. According to him the greatest curse for a man was to be remaining in conditions of slavery, the grossest crime, compromising with injustice and wrong and the highest virtue was to be battling against iniquity at whatever cost.

The remarkable organizational ability and the inspiring leadership of Netaji aroused the Indian community scattered all over East Asia to a new sense of national identity and patriotism. He proclaimed the Provisional Government of *Azad Hind* in October 1943 which was recognized by several nations. Soon after the Japanese Government's decision to transfer the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Provisional Government, Netaji triumphantly declared: "For Indians, the return of the Andaman represents the first territory to be liberated from British yoke. By the acquisition of this territory, the Provisional Government has now become a national entity in fact as well as in name". Netaji's heroic acts infused the freedom struggle with a new vigour in those trying times.

I must say that the Anniversary of this historic event assumes added significance for all of us in the sense that it not only reminds us of the fact that Andamans was the first Indian territory freed from the British rule but it also affirmed the establishment of a Provisional Government of *Azad Hind* as a national entity. Today, we recall with reverence and admiration the supreme acts of exemplary courage, strong determination and indomitable will of Netaji Subhas Bose and the great sacrifices of his INA comrades for the liberation of the country. The saga of their valour, conviction and sacrifice, I am sure, will continue to inspire the people of India and all those who cherish freedom and human dignity everywhere.

If today we make an effort to understand fully what motivated leaders like Netaji to make the supreme sacrifice in the interest of freedom and integrity of the nation, we will not be inclined to resort to practices that undermines the credibility of our democracy or to subscribe to narrow ideologies that could weaken our country in any manner. If the post-Independence generations ever do anything to discredit our system of governance, to compromise our national unity or to weaken our country, it will be acts of ingratitude to the memory of our Founding Fathers like Netaji. The best way, therefore, to pay our tributes to the memory of leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose today, would be by resolving to conduct ourselves as worthy inheritors of the great legacy left behind by our Founding Fathers, by infusing finer values into our democratic experiments, by perfecting our system of governance and by making concerted efforts to forge and sustain unshakeable bonds of unity among our diverse population.

The people of Andman and Nicobar—*Shaheed* and *Swaraj,* in the immortal words of Netaji—have been privileged to share a momentous event in our nation's history. It is left to each one of us to strive in our own humble ways to preserve and protect the unity and integrity of our country by all means. With these words, I extend my felicitations to all of you on this historic occasion. Let me also wish all of you a very happy, peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Thank you. *Jai Hind.*

COMRADE GANGADHAR ADHIKARI: A LEGEND OF THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT*

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to be here today to receive the Dr. Gangadhar Adhikari Award 2004, instituted in memory of one of the pioneering and acknowledged leaders of the Communist Movement in the country.

May I, at the outset, express my sincere gratitude to Balraj Sahni–Sahir Ludhianvi Foundation, Pune, particularly to Late Comrade Kusumtai Ranadive for bestowing this honour on me. In fact, it is with deep humility and a profound sense of obligation that I stand here today to receive the *Dr. Gangadhar Adhikari Award.* I am particularly honoured that the Comrade Kusumtai herself, a cousin of Comrade Gangadhar Adhikari and the sister of the legendary Comrade B.T. Ranadive and a leader of the Communist Movement and a freedom fighter, in her own right, had desired that I should receive this prestigious Award. To my regret and great disappointment, I did not have the good fortune to receive the Award in her presence though she had desired so two years back. I wish to pay my profound respect to her everlasting memory.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Foundation for having organized this function, thereby affording me an opportunity to pay my humble tributes to the memory of Comrade Gangadhar Adhikari. The Foundation, set up in memory of Balraj Sahni and Sahir Ludhianvi—two leading personalities of modern India—has been dedicated to the mission of promoting secular and progressive ideas, which, as we all know, constituted the basis of Comrade Adhikari's thoughts and works as well.

Looking back at the India of Comrade Adhikari's early days, one sees the existence of two conflicting situations. On the one hand, the idea of freedom had gripped the nation and the lofty ideals of emancipation, human dignity and social equality were being nurtured and nourished; on the other, underneath these lofty goals, there was also deep-rooted inequality and deprivation, which dogged the lives of our teeming millions. It was indeed a formidable challenge for the nascent Communist Movement, more so for

* While receiving the Dr. Gangadhar Adhikari Award, 2004, instituted by the Balraj Sahni-Sahir Ludhianvi Foundation, Pune (28 May 2006).

its founding fathers and torch-bearers, to harmonize the interests of the working class and the vulnerable with the broad contours of our nationalist movement.

It was a perfect stage for a radical revolutionary like Comrade Adhikari, who sacrificed a promising scientific career and threw himself into public life, and spent the rest of his life for the amelioration of the lot of those who were not fortunate to reap the benefits of progress. Soon after his arrival from Germany and after seeing the plight of our people, he was convinced that it was the complex nexus between the capitalist and colonial forces that could be attributed to India's underdevelopment. It was this perceptive understanding of the existing situation which prompted him to analyse and adapt the teachings and message of Marxism to our native realities and conditions, which he felt was an antidote to India's complex problems of poverty, inequality and deprivation.

Comrade Adhikari's unflinching determination and dedication to the cause of the socio-economic transformation of the country was sensed early both by the leaders of the Communist Movement in India and the colonial forces. In fact, it speaks volumes of his wide acceptance among the rank and file as also his intellectual vigour and depth that very soon, he was elevated to the higher echelons of the Communist Party of India, which, as was expected, led to repeated arrests, persecution and personal sufferings. His radical presence revitalized the Communist Movement in those days and he remained the living spirit behind the Party. From then on, his life was a saga of relentless political struggle while remaining in jail or underground most of the time. Today, when we look back at his varied contributions, there is no denying the fact that he was one of the original thinkers of modern India, who relentlessly strove to free the masses from the imperial and capitalist bondage and an exploitative order.

Friends, if the working class ideology is still very much alive, appealing to millions of people, it is largely due to the intellectual integrity, farsightedness, moral strength and broader outlook of pioneering leaders like Comrade Adhikari, who effectively articulated the ideals of secularism, inclusiveness and socio-economic equality for the country during a crucial phase in its history. Comrade Adhikari's exemplary contributions to the Indian nation is well recognized, but in serving the Movement, he also served the interests of the millions of people who had suffered mutely under the colonial yoke. His door always remained open to all, who needed any help from him. And, while he endeavoured to help them solve their problems, he himself suffered immensely in personal life. I am particularly moved by Comrade S.G. Sardesai's poignant account of how courageously he managed himself after the untimely death of his only son. Referring to his courage and poise,

Comrade Sardesai wrote: 'That whole night I wondered where does he get all this courage and equanimity from?' The only answer was that there was no existence for him outside the Communist world of thought and action, which absorbed the entirety of his being and consciousness. His equanimity of temperament and the utmost passion for the welfare of the masses made him a legend of the Communist Movement.

He had demonstrated such extraordinary grace under pressure, while defending the nationalist leaders, including himself, accused of the historic Meerut Conspiracy case, in 1929. In his Statement before the Sessions Judge, he said :

> ..... You may search through the whole file of the evidence and exhibits filed in this case and fail to lay your finger upon a single overt criminal act... . I am merely charged because I was a member of the Communist Party. The nature of the present case is such that the question of defending the individual does not arise. The question is to defend the Party, its ideology, its right to exist. ... It is not for your honour to question, but to implicitly obey the bidding of the executive which in this case is identical with the complainant... . Do your worst, we are not afraid in the least of the punishment you are going to give. We are ready to face even death for our patriotism, freedom, democracy and socialism. ...

Friends, such was the courage of conviction of Comrade Adhikari. What is the message of Comrade Adhikari that we need to imbibe today? As I understand it, when we speak of the imperative of selfless service and probity in public life, values of great significance for our country today, lives of leaders like Comrade Adhikari serve as role models for all of us. He earnestly believed in simple life, shunned luxuries in whatever form they came his way, and dedicated himself completely to serving those who needed him the most. Of course, it was not an easy task. In fact, he fought against heavy odds. He could tide over the challenges that he faced, largely due to his inherent simplicity and unwavering commitment to the goals of the Communist Movement and social and economic democracy. Today, there is an urgent need to make many more of our countrymen aware of Comrade Adhikari's contributions so that his role in the process of nationbuilding could be brought forth in a meaningful and purposive manner.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not pay my tributes to the memory of two outstanding figures in whose memory the Balraj Sahni–Sahir Ludhianvi Foundation has been set up. If Balraj Sahni's films demonstrated a remarkable sense of humanism, and delicate handling of complex situations, Sahir Ludhianvi was one of the finest weavers of words. While Balraj Sahni was perhaps the first hero who refused to fit the mould, Sahir Ludhianvi's

poetry reflected the mood of the times. Both of them, in their own ways, raised the standard of excellence in the world of cinema. And, beyond their cinematic and literary excellence, they were renowned and respected for their genuine social conscience and perspective and secular values with commitment to the welfare of the vulnerable sections of Indian society. In fact, it was their abiding concern for the people that allowed them to perform their respective roles with an honesty and sincerity that is rare to find.

I am happy that the Foundation, set up in the revered memory of Balraj Sahni and Sahir Ludhianvi, has been rendering yeoman's services towards the promotion of a secular, inclusive and tolerant society. It is only befitting, therefore, that the Foundation has instituted an Award in the name of Comrade Gangadhar Adhikari who epitomized all these values in his life. I am sure that the Foundation will continue to make their invaluable contribution towards building a secular, socially just and progressive order in times to come.

Let me also take this opportunity to felicitate Mr. Satish Kalsekar and Mr. Iqbal Mukadam, both accomplished, progressive writers, for being chosen to share the Kaifi Azami Award, and to Mr. Syed Asif, the other accomplished writer on being chosen for the Sahir Ludhianvi Award. It is an honour to be asked to confer these awards on these activist and socially sensitive men of letters today. It is most appropriate that both the Awards, in honour of two outstanding personalities, are being conferred by the Foundation at this function.

With these words, I once again thank everyone associated with this function for having given me this opportunity to be in the midst of this august audience. In receiving with all humility this honour instituted in the memory of an outstanding leader of the Communist Movement in the country, I salute the commitment and dedication to the movement and to the nation exemplified by Comrade Gangadhar Adhikari and take it as a greater challenge to be able to emulate the values and principles upheld by him all his life, in my words and deeds too.

Thank you.

MRINALINI SARABHAI: THE HIGH PRIESTESS OF INDIAN DANCE*

It is indeed an honour to have been called upon to present the prestigious V. Gangadharan Smaraka Trust Award, to Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai, this evening in this beautiful town of Kollam. Smt. Sarabhai is one of India's most celebrated dancers and choreographers who has, if I may say so, rightly achieved international reputation unmatched by any contemporary Indian classical dancers. Through a life characterized by unusual activism in diverse areas and passionate commitment to social causes she has created a niche for herself in the socio-cultural firmament of the country. By choosing Smt. Sarabhai for the Award, the Award Committee has enriched the value of the Award and is truly honouring the memory of one of the distinguished sons of Kerala, the eminent freedom fighter, a former Speaker of the Thiru-Kochi Assembly, and a prominent public figure of early years of our Independence, late Shri Gangadharan in whose name the Award is instituted. I compliment the Kadappakkada Sports Club, on instituting this Award and for its selection of the awardees over the years. The Club, known for its progressive outlook and noticeable contributions in the cultural, sports and social fields, is doing a commendable job in deciding to honour Keralites who make significant contributions in their chosen fields of work. With this Award, I am particularly happy to note that Smt. Sarabhai is joining the list of the distinguished Awardees, like Late. Shri C. Achuta Menon, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, and Smt. K.R. Gouriamma, all highly accomplished Keralites on their own rights.

It is not given to many to combine very fine artistic interests with an equally passionate interest in the literary, developmental, environmental and the socio-political issues of the time. Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai has been a dancer, choreographer, poet, writer, environmentalist, humanist and teacher *par excellence*. She has more than three hundred dance dramas of her own creation to her credit and has written extensively on subjects ranging from dance and poetry to mythology, besides being the author of several works of fiction. Creative writing, and performing arts have been 'two integral parts of her personality', as she herself puts it.

* At the function to present the V. Gangadharan Smaraka Trust Award to Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai, Kollam, Kerala (4 October 2006).

The contributions she has been making in the field of art and culture through the *Darpana* Academy of Performing Arts, Ahmedabad, which she founded nearly six decades back, on the banks of the Sabarmati, are immeasurable. She has given new concepts to traditional dance forms with fresh perspectives and new mysteries and she is recognized as the *'the High Priestess of Indian dance'* within the country and outside. As a learned film and theatre personality has put it, 'In most people there is a clear divide between their creative life and what they are as a person. But Mrinalini is a total human being.' Committed as she is to the Gandhian values, she has introduced the Centre for Non-Violence through Performing Arts, which seeks to spread the message of peace and non-violence through the arts, as part of *Darpana*. The nature club she heads called, the *Prakriti*, does a very good job in instilling love and concern for the environment among children.

As an artiste, she has always striven to express her fearless views through her chosen art form of dance, and as a social activist, she has consistently been the voice of the voiceless. A staunch critic of communalism and totally committed to secular values and India's unity and integrity, she is uncompromising in her fight against the communal agenda and in the defence of secular values of the country. In all the different roles that she has been living — as an artiste, activist, teacher, daughter, wife and mother, Smt. Mrinalini Sarabahi has been a role model for women everywhere and in everything she does, she personifies the best in our culture and tradition.

It has, therefore, been quite appropriate that several prestigious national and international awards and recognitions have been conferred on her. They are, in fact too many to be mentioned here. This includes the coveted Vishwa Gurjari Award, the Madhya Pradesh Government's Kalidas Samman, Kerala Kalamandalam Fellowship and several D.Litt. degrees from reputed centres, including one from the Rabindra Bharati University of Calcutta and the prestigious Desikottama (D.Litt. *Honoris Causa*) degree, the highest honour of the Vishva-Bharathi University, founded by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan, and a Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan, to mention only a few – all for her contribution to the preservation of Indian classical dance, art and culture. Today's Award is yet another feather in her already crowded cap.

While Kerala is rightly taking pride in her association with the State, with my own emotional bonding with Shantiniketan, we do not want to renounce our claim on her linkages with that place sanctified by the life and works of Gurudev Tagore. She is one of the very few surviving disciples of Gurudev. Her father, Shri Swaminathan had chosen Shantiniketan, for his daughter's early upbringing, and so it is all the more a matter of pride for me to be here and to present this prestigious award to Smt. Sarabhai who has always remained not only the pride of Kerala but of the entire country. Her

elder sister Captain Lakshmi continues to be a source of inspiration for all of us. The Space Research Centre in the name of her husband Vikram Sarabhai inspires thousands of youngsters in India to dream of exploring the universe. Her daughter, Mallika Sarabhai, is another accomplished dancer, activist and publisher about whom our country is also greatly proud.

Once again, I congratulate Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai on being chosen for the award. I am grateful to the Kadappakkada Sports Club and to the Hon'ble Minister Shri M.A. Baby for the opportunity given to me to associate with this function this evening in this beautiful town of Kollam.

Thank you.

BUILDERS OF MODERN KERALA*

I feel greatly honoured to be here today amidst this distinguished gathering at the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the formation of the State of Kerala being organized by the YMCAs. I thank the YMCA South-west India Region for inviting me to join you all on this occasion to felicitate Respected Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer and Respected Smt. K.R. Gauri Amma, who have the distinction of being part of the first Ministry of composite Kerala, a historic one for another important reason that it was the first ever elected Government led by a leader of the Communist Party of India. On this occasion, I would like to pay my respectful tributes to the memory of those who provided leadership to that historic ministry, as also to all those whose struggles and sacrifices made it possible for the emergence of such a progressive administration in the State so early in the post-Independence history of the country. In fact, that First Kerala Ministry has had several illustrious leaders. Together, they laid the foundations for a progressive State. It is befitting that you have also chosen the occasion to felicitate the veteran leader and the former Chief Minister and Union Minister, Shri Karunakaran. All of them have earned a special place in the hearts and minds of the people of the State and a place of pride in its developmental history in different ways.

It is a matter of great pleasure that the YMCA Kerala Region which was formed in the year 1954 has grown over the years into the biggest Region in the National Council of YMCAs. In fact, the contribution of the YMCA is acknowledged the world over for its pursuits in the direction of welfare and for the development of the people without any discrimination on the basis of their caste, colour, sex, race or nationality. The pioneering service the YMCA has been rendering in the spheres of rural education, relief to the refugees, provision of youth hostels and rural reconstruction are all important endeavours in attaining the aim of social welfare.

Kerala at fifty has many reasons to celebrate. She has, undoubtedly, made significant progress on various fronts all these years and the State today occupies an important place in the political, economic and cultural landscape of India. In the matter of literacy and education, health-care infrastructure and other human development indicators, Kerala today stands among the front ranking States of the country, almost on par with the most advanced

* At the function to felicitate Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, Smt. K.R. Gauri Amma, and Shri K. Karunakaran, Ernakulam, Kerala (7 October 2006).

countries of the world. The hard-working and dedicated people of Kerala have been able to set a high benchmark in almost all the spheres of their activity. Today, the professionals of Kerala are among the most sought after in diverse fields. Across the world, the enterprising Keralites have made their mark. What is most important for which any one could be proud of Kerala is its achievement in maintaining societal harmony that has helped greatly in shaping the composite culture of the land.

I take this opportunity to convey my respectful greetings to Hon'ble Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, Smt. K.R. Gauri Amma and Shri K. Karunakaran, all of whom have been integral part of the enlightened leadership of Kerala and who have been making their distinct mark on the State in different ways.

Justice Krishna Iyer is verily one of the multifaceted personalities of our time. With his unmatched erudition, his felicity of language, his breadth of vision, his incisive world view, his perceptive understanding of the issues of our times, and his concern and compassion for the underprivileged in our society, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer occupies a pre-eminent position among the most illustrious sons of India living today. His stints with the erstwhile Madras Legislative Assembly, and subsequently, with the Kerala Assembly and the Ministership handling very important portfolios in the first Kerala Ministry, proved beyond doubt his exceptional wisdom, legal and administrative acumen, transparent honesty, and unquestionable commitment to the larger public causes.

He withdrew from active political life in 1965 only to make a deeper imprint on the judicial system and the country's socio-political life as such, in the years that followed. Before he was elevated to the Supreme Court in July 1973, Justice Krishna Iyer had gained a reputation as among the topmost jurists of the country and his contribution from the Bench in Kerala High Court had clearly established his pro-people view of jurisprudence in all its dimensions. He carried into the higher Judiciary the rare combination of legislative and executive experiences. Our Judiciary stood to gain enormously from this.

Though it is almost a quarter century since he retired from the Supreme Court, his influence on the judicial system as a whole is quite visible. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Justice Iyer has transformed Indian jurisprudence and democratized our judicial process by imparting new dimensions of compassionate humanism to the Rule of Law. He gave a pro-poor dimension to the concept of Rule of Law itself in the country. He unambiguously established that the laws have to be interpreted in the context of the society and that law is the most potent instrument to bring about social change. He would not brook an injustice done to any.

Justice Krishna Iyer represents the best in the Indian culture and its values. All his life, he has been living as a role model for those in public life. His unquestionable secular approach, his commitment to the pro-people causes, his advocacy of the rights of the underprivileged, his crusade against corruption in our polity, his initiatives for bringing about transparency in our electoral processes, his liberal views on the Constitution and his concern for the environment, have all made their deep and lasting impact on the socio-political life of the country.

It is his passionate commitment to the larger social causes and to the problems of the poor and the marginalized that gives him the strength to walk around the national stage with youthful energy and the zeal of an activist even at the age of ninety-two. The worlds of jurisprudence, of learning and literature, of the English language itself, and our national life as such, have become richer in the life of our own respected Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer. It will, in fact, be difficult to quantify the extent of the impact he has made and continuing to make on the life of our times. I take it as a great honour that I have the opportunity to pay my respect and to felicitate him this morning here. I wish him good health and many more years of life in the service of the people.

Smt. K.R. Gauri Amma too has played a profound and significant role in shaping the destiny of the present day Kerala. In those crucial years of the freedom struggle in the 1930s and the 1940s, when most women stayed away from the rough and tumble of public life, Smt. Gauri Amma entered the risky and uncertain world of politics and that too from the platform of the Left Movement, to take up the cause of the poor peasants who were mired in poverty and penury. A relentless and staunch crusader for the downtrodden, Gauri Amma got elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1952 and 1954 with overwhelming majority and carved out a niche for herself in the State politics. Her electoral victory thirteen times, out of the fifteen she fought, speaks volumes about her popularity and her commitment to the public causes. Smt. Gauri Amma holds the record of serving umpteen times as a member in the Assembly of the State. She also served Kerala as a Minister in five different Ministries which included the First Ministry of the State.

As the Minister for Revenue in the First Ministry, Smt. Gauri Amma made history by introducing the epoch-making Kerala Land Reforms Bill in the State Assembly thereby initiating the process of land reforms with a view to putting an end to the centuries' old feudal system. No doubt, it was a path-breaking initiative which at one stroke transformed for the better, the living conditions of a large number of otherwise marginalized sections of the people of the State. All through her public life, Smt. Gauri Amma participated in various agitations and movements and was incarcerated on several

occasions. The physical and mental agony which she had to undergo for holding on to her convictions did not deter her from working tirelessly and selflessly for the masses. Even at this advanced age of her life, Smt. Gauri Amma continues to inspire the people with her commitment to public causes, steely determination and conviction. The State of Kerala is privileged that Smt. Gauri Amma has been one of its foremost leaders.

Friends, today we also have with us Shri K. Karunakaran, 'the Leader', who has made significant contributions to the State through his long years of public life and the leadership he provided to the State. As you all are aware, Shri Karunakaran has the privilege of serving the State and contributing to its development by getting elected seven times to the Kerala Legislative Assembly. Four times, he led the State admirably as the Chief Minister and he has also served as a Union Minister. He also did have his impressive innings in both the Houses of Parliament. All through his public life, he has striven ceaselessly for the welfare of the people of Kerala.

The achievements that Kerala has made in the last five decades have been remarkable indeed, and in fact, there is always a reference to the 'Kerala Model of Development', whenever there is a discussion about developmental paradigms. This, is an eloquent testimony to the vision and sagacity of the leaders of this State. But there should not be any complacency. There are various socio-economic and developmental challenges being faced by the State in the context of economic reforms and globalization. The accumulated wisdom of these leaders of Kerala can always guide the emerging leadership in the right direction. In fact, this very function where leaders cutting across political ideologies and affiliations have come together, and are being felicitated, speaks of the healthy political culture which this State has developed. Through the collective efforts of the leaders and the innate skills and the political wisdom of the people of the State, I am sure, Kerala will raise its own benchmark in human development and progress. I wish all the leaders we are honouring today many more years of active service to the nation and the people of this beautiful State the very best in the years ahead.

With these words, I once again thank the YMCAs of Kerala Region for providing me this unique opportunity to be with some of the intellectual giants and legendary leaders of Kerala. I wish the YMCAs all success in their missions.

Thank you.

We have gathered here today to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of our First War of Independence that began in 1857, and also the Birth Centenary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, which the Sadbhavana Samiti, Hansi, has organised. On this occasion, I pay my humble tributes to Shaheed Bhagat Singh and the other martyrs of the 1857 War of Independence. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Sadbhavana Samiti for organising this function in Hansi and for its deep commitment to the lofty values of secularism, communal harmony and peace, values cherished by our freedom fighters and the Founding Fathers.

Friends, Hansi occupies an important place in our history, as it was one of the key centres of that great event associated with our struggle for freedom. The Lal Sarak of Hansi still reminds us of how the freedom fighters of this town and the surrounding villages like Putthi Mangal Khan, Rohnat, Hazampur and Jamalpur preferred death to slavery. The inhuman torture and the other intimidatory tactics of the colonial rulers could not kill their urge for freedom and they joined the war and ready to make the supreme sacrifice, which hundreds of them indeed did. Names like Shaheed Hukam Chand Jain and Shaheed Mirza Munir Beig, and many others will always remain a source of inspiration for the people.

As history has recorded, during the Revolt of 1857, the people of this area fought valiantly against the might of the British Empire and had to suffer untold miseries. They are justly proud of their brave and illustrious ancestors who sacrificed everything for the cause of the country's Independence. It is indeed a glorious moment for all of us as we mark this event in all its solemnity. On this occasion, let us pay our humble homage to the freedom fighters and offer our tributes to the martyrs.

The War of 1857 was undoubtedly an epoch-making event in India's struggle for freedom. For what the British sought to deride as a mere sepoy mutiny was India's First War of Independence in a very true sense, when people from all walks of life, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and language, rose against the British rule. Comrade Hiren Mukherjee, who was a profound scholar and veteran of the communist movement, even regarded

* At the 150th Anniversary of the Revolt of 1857 and the Birth Centenary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Hansi, Haryana (10 October 2006).

the 1857 event as marking the genesis of nationalism in India and said that India after 1857 did not remain what it was before.

On this solemn occasion, we must note that there was a discerning connection between the war of 1857 and the movement launched by Shaheed Bhagat Singh for the liberation of our country. As we know, when Indian immigrants in the USA and Canada formed the Ghadar Party in San Francisco in November 1913, the War of Independence of 1857 was their direct source of inspiration, so much so that the very name Ghadar, meaning mutiny, was drawn from the Great Uprising of 1857. Though Indians from Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and other provinces contributed to the formation of the Party, its main base came from the peasantry of the undivided Punjab, and many of them belonged to what today is the State of Haryana, a fact about which you all are very proud of. The sacrifices made by the members of the Ghadar Party for the cause of Independence inspired the whole course of our freedom struggle subsequently. The revolutionary zeal displayed by Kartar Singh Sarabha, who was in his teens when he was sent to gallows along with many fellow freedom fighters, was a big source of inspiration for Bhagat Singh and his generation of revolutionaries. Thus, we can see the continuum of the chain of events, from the 1857 War of Independence to the movement launched by Bhagat Singh and his comrades, in the context of the overall history of our freedom movement. The entry of leaders like Bhagat Singh into the freedom movement, in fact, considerably helped it in gaining greater momentum, inspiring the future generations to continue the same, which has ultimately helped us to win our freedom.

When we gather here to remember our martyrs and freedom fighters, we must also remember the fact that they were inspired by certain values — the values that were meant for upholding national unity and communal harmony. It was in this tradition that our revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh were nurtured. We recall with reverence the exceptional contributions made by our freedom fighters and particularly by martyrs like Bhagat Singh for whom India's freedom was the first and immediate goal to be achieved as a prerequisite to the country's regeneration. He, in many ways, gave a wholly new orientation to the freedom movement in the country. He had, in fact, visualised a united India free from communalism and casteism, superstitions, reactionary values and moribund traditions. He always separated religion from politics and the State. Referring to the Ghadar Party's movement, he wrote in one of his articles: 'The martyrs kept religion outside politics. Their conception was that religion was the private matter of individuals. Others should not interfere in that, nor should it be injected into politics.'

No doubt, it was the tireless endeavours and the many sacrifices of a whole gamut of martyrs from those of 1857 up to Shaheed Bhagat Singh and

later, which eventually paved the way for our Independence, the fruits of which we are enjoying today. Not only did these martyrs give up their lives for the sake of the country's freedom but also left a message for the future generations — a message of sacrifice, courage of conviction, a strong belief in the ultimate victory of the people in their war against oppression.

Today, almost into the seventh decade of freedom, we need to introspect and see to what extent have we been able to realise the dreams of our Founding Fathers and the martyrs of our freedom movement. Their dreams about a resurgent India and an egalitarian society free from class exploitation and oppression still remain unfulfilled. Our people still confront various forms of iniquities, deprivation and discrimination, as also the scourge of poverty. Political democracy can be translated into real and meaningful socio-economic democracy only when all iniquities and deprivations are removed. I am sure, the courage of conviction, tenacity of purpose and selfless sacrifices of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and other martyrs will continue to inspire generations to come.

With these words, I once again pay my humble tributes to the martyrs of the 1857 War of Independence in Hansi and other parts of the country, to Shaheed Bhagat Singh and all other freedom fighters who set an outstanding example of patriotism and valour by sacrificing their lives for the sake of the country's dignity and freedom. Let us all rededicate ourselves to the lofty ideals and values for which they lived and died. I am grateful to Sadbhavana Samiti of Hansi and to Shri Prabhash Joshi for this opportunity provided to me.

Thank you.

SHAHEED JAYEE RAJGURU: SHINING EXAMPLE OF SELFLESS SACRIFICE*

We are gathered here today to commemorate the bi-centenary martyrdom year of Jaykrushna Mahapatra, popularly known as Shaheed Jayee Rajguru. On this occasion, I join you all in paying my humble tributes to Shaheed Jayee Rajguru for his supreme sacrifice to the cause of the freedom of our country. I compliment the Bharatee Media Foundation for organising the function to pay our homage to this outstanding national leader.

The life of Shaheed Jayee Rajguru, a Rajguru to the King of Khurda, is a shining example of rare courage, steely determination and selfless sacrifice. He was not only an embodiment of bravery and nationalism but also a renowned scholar of Sanskrit and an astute strategist. He was one of the first who resisted the British rule in Khurda and spoke out against exploitation and injustice which characterised the rule of the East India Company during the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. For his courage of conviction, he had to make the supreme sacrifice when he was executed by the Britishers in 1806. Daring to challenge the British rule in those early years of British colonialism in India, was indeed a risky preposition. His revolt represented a small beginning but his heroic resistance inspired some well known tribal movements in the later years. The Kol rising in 1832 and the Santhal movement of 1855-56, which laid the genesis of an epoch-making event — the 1857 War of Independence, drew largely from Rajguru's revolt. It speaks volumes of Shaheed Jayee Rajguru's popularity, bravery and ardent nationalist spirit that even after two hundred years of his martyrdom, he is affectionately remembered and widely respected by a grateful nation.

As history records, after the British attacked Orissa and occupied its major pockets in 1803, they issued notice to the rulers of smaller kingdoms to be subservient and pay taxes to the British treasury. While many rulers signed the notice, without questioning, the King of Khurda chose not to sign the notice on the advice of Shaheed Jayee Rajguru. Knowing that the war against the Britishers was an inevitability, the Rajguru prepared the army for it and appealed to the people to come forward and be ready for sacrifice to save their Motherland. He also enlisted the support of other neighbouring

* At the fucntion to mark the bi-centenary Martyrdom Day of Shaheed Jayee Rajguru New Delhi (6 December 2006).

kingdoms by unifying them for a combined defence strategy against the British forces. In fact, the Khurda Rising of 1804 which Shaheed Rajguru led from the front, was a people's war in many a sense. Soon, his efforts gave rise to a mass movement with every household contributing a soldier, trained in different war skills, and people grouping themselves under his leadership.

Jayee Rajguru attacked the British forces in 1804 on the banks of the river Mahanadi and with this news spreading far and wide, many such attacks followed on the British troops at various places. Having suffered a severe setback at the hands of the Rajguru's forces, the Britishers called in additional battalions from Madras to reinforce their strength. The final battle, the 'Battle of Barunei' took place in December 1804 at the foothills of the Barunei mountain between the British and the soldiers led by Jayee Rajguru. The fort was seized for three days and in a fiercely fought battle, a handful of soldiers in the fort fought gallantly against the 7,000 strong British army. The battle skill, valour and sacrifices of Jayee Rajguru and his followers are still remembered by the people even after 200 years.

The British resorted to the Divide and Rule policy by tempting a few of the locals by offering large tax free land holding in return for information about the whereabouts of Jayee Rajguru, his battle plan and inside information of the fort. As a result, Jayee Rajguru was captured and arrested. But sensing the danger of his capture, Jayee Rajguru moved the King to a safe place with his trusted lieutenants, so that the symbol of sovereignty of his land could be protected against the Britishers. Jayee Rajguru exhibited his abiding love and eternal loyalty of the highest order to the motherland by protecting the King from the humiliation, even at the cost of his own life.

The British took Jayee Rajguru to far off Medinipur for trial, because otherwise, his presence would have sparked off a rebellion in the State. After the so-called 'trial' by the British court, he was awarded capital punishment for waging war against the State. It bears eloquent testimony to the courage and bravery of Jayee Rajguru that he did not appeal for mercy and forcefully told the court that fighting for freedom of one's motherland was never a crime. On 6 December 1806, Jayee attained martyrdom, bringing to an end a saga of patriotism, courage, ingenuity and bravery. He was the first martyr from Orissa in the freedom struggle and also one of the earliest martyrs in our freedom movement. When leaders like Shaheed Jayee Rajguru plunged themselves into the revolt against the British rule, they were not motivated by any selfish consideration. Their struggle was for a higher ideal which was the liberation of the country from the shackles of slavery so that the people could live in freedom and dignity.

In the wake of achieving political freedom, our Founding Fathers established a parliamentary democratic system with the hope that the people's

representative institutions that the system provided for, would play the decisive role in it by earnestly discussing people's problems and by deciding issues on merit keeping only the larger interests of the people in mind. They had visualized that institutions of democracy and the individuals who constituted them would conduct themselves as role models for the people at large. Today, the leaders and the representatives of the people at different levels need to seriously introspect and see for themselves whether or not they are living up to that hope and trust placed on them by our Founding Fathers and up to the expectations of the common people of our country. The lives of great freedom fighters and the martyrs of our freedom movement like Shaheed Jayee Rajguru, should inspire us in living up to that hope and trust placed on us and in striving to establish the kind of society that they had visualized for us.

With these words, I once again pay my humble tributes to the memory of this brave son of India. Let us all rededicate ourselves to the lofty ideals and values for which Jayee Rajguru lived and made the supreme sacrifice.

Thank you.

OUR FREEDOM STRUGGLE: A PAN INDIAN MOVEMENT*

It is indeed a matter of great honour for me to associate myself with this function being organised to pay homage to eight renowned freedom fighters of Orissa who laid down their lives for the cause of the nation. As we all know, this year, we are celebrating the 150th year of the First War of Independence, which fired the first salvo against foreign rule in an organized manner. Incidentally, we are also celebrating the Birth Centenary Year of Shaheed Bhagat Singh this year. It is all the more appropriate, therefore, that the Shaheed Raghu-Dibakar Smruti Sansad has organized this function to commemorate the martyrdom of some very eminent freedom fighters of Orissa. I join all of you here today in paying my humble tributes to these heroes and martyrs of our freedom struggle.

India's freedom struggle was undoubtedly a pan-Indian movement in which people from across the country took part in very large numbers. The people of Orissa too played a very stellar role in our freedom struggle. In the long drawn and popular upsurge against alien rule, many men and women sacrificed their lives for the cause of the motherland. While there are historical evidence to the valour, bravery and gallantry of several of them, there are many unsung heroes about whom we do not know much. Nonetheless, a grateful nation always holds each one of them, known and unknown, in high esteem and reverence.

Among the martyrs to whom we are paying our homage today, the first to raise the banner of revolt against the British domination was Shaheed Jayee Rajguru. Last month, I had the privilege of associating with a function organized by my colleague Shri Braja Kishore Tripathyji in Delhi, in memory of Shaheed Jayee Rajguru. The Rajguru of Khurda was one of the first martyrs who resisted the British rule and fought against exploitation and injustice which characterized their reign. Daring to challenge the British rule in those early years of British colonialism in India was indeed an act of heroism. Known for his courage of conviction and valour, he fought till the last and never surrendered to the foreign rulers. He was executed by the British as early as in 1806. His revolt represented a significant beginning and his heroic

* At the function organized by the Shaheed Raghu-Dibakar Smruti Sansad to pay homage to eight martyrs of Orissa, Bhubaneswar (23 January 2007).

resistance gave momentum to some well known tribal movements in the later years. The Kol rising of 1832 and the Santhal movement of 1855-56, which was in a way the genesis of the epoch-making event—the 1857 War of Independence — drew largely from the Rajguru's revolt. It speaks volumes of Shaheed Jayee Rajguru's popularity, bravery and ardent nationalist spirit that even after two hundred years of his martyrdom, he is affectionately remembered and widely respected across the country.

Another distinguished freedom fighter from Orissa during the early years of the freedom struggle and who had the unique privilege of being the Advisor of Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi was Chandan Hazuri. Popularly known as Chakhi Khuntia, he played a very crucial role in the liberation struggle by mobilizing the Sepoys and organizing the mutiny, for which he suffered at the hands of the British. This valiant freedom fighter breathed his last in 1870 in Puri and it is only appropriate that we are paying homage to him also today.

As for the indomitable Veer Surendra Sai, his close involvement and active association with the freedom struggle, like that of Jayee Rajguru, predates the outbreak of the First War of Independence in 1857. He rebelled against the British rule in 1827 when he was only 18 years of age and continued his struggle even after his arrest in 1864. He was incarcerated in Hazaribagh jail for seventeen long years in the course of the sustained struggle against the British and died at the Asirgad Fort prison in 1884. Veer Surendra Sai was not merely a great freedom fighter; he was also an acclaimed revolutionary who championed the cause of the downtrodden and the tribal people. He endeavoured untiringly to bring the marginalized sections of society into the mainstream and succeeded in no small measure in enlisting their unstinted support to the freedom struggle. Acknowledging his invaluable contributions to our liberation movement, several scholars have commented that he was a 'Child of the Historic Revolution of 1857' as Napoleon was a 'Child of the French Revolution of 1789'.

Yet another revolutionary leader who relentlessly espoused the cause of the tribals and also fought for national freedom was the legendary Birsa Munda. During his very short life of 25 years, he valiantly confronted the British for the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the tribals. Birsa Munda effectively used the myths and symbols of his society and culture to become a rallying point for the people, and in the process he brought them together to rise against foreign rule, oppression and injustice. The British colonial system had intensified the transformation of the tribal agrarian system into a feudal state in those years. As the tribals with their primitive technology could not generate a surplus, the non-tribal peasantry were invited by the chiefs in Chotanagpur to settle on and cultivate the land. This, in turn, impelled Birsa Munda to wage a struggle against the exploitation of the tribals who

were deprived of their land. The movement sought to assert the rights of the tribals as the real proprietors of the soil, and the expulsion of the middlemen and the Britishers. His strategy and tactics of armed rebellion which he employed during the late nineteenth century is often compared with the strategy adopted by the legendary General Giap in Vietnam. His movement was also infused with the spirit of religious reform, social justice and cultural regeneration. Birsa Munda was caught by the authorities on 3 February 1900 and died in mysterious circumstances on 9 June 1900 in the Ranchi jail at the very young age of 25.

The youngest of the freedom fighters and martyrs to whom we are paying our homage today was Baji Rout, who, over the years, has become a legend in Orissa. I understand that Baji Rout, at the tender age of 12, was in charge of a country boat on the banks of the river Brahmani at Nilakantapur. Young Baji Rout was courageous enough to refuse the Police to cross the river in his boat so as to escape the wrath of the villagers for having killed some people who had revolted against the British. This act of bravery outraged the Police who fired on Baji Rout, killing him on the spot in October 1938. I am told that this act of bravery has been immortalized by the Jnanpith award winning progressive Oriya poet late Sachidananda Routroy in a poem which very poignantly captures the valour and bravery of the young patriot. Baji Rout will always be remembered and revered as one of the youngest freedom fighters in the history of India.

Another freedom fighter from Orissa who also fought for the rights of the tribals was Laxman Nayak. Responding to the call of Mahatma Gandhi, Laxman Nayak led a procession on 21 August 1942 and demonstrated in front of a Police Station. The Police fired at the demonstrators indiscriminately, resulting in the death of forty freedom fighters and injuries to as many as 200 of them. Subsequently, the British administration falsely implicated Laxman Nayak in a case of murder and he was hanged to death on 29 March 1943 in Berhampur Jail. Like Veer Surendra Sai and Birsa Munda before him, Laxman Nayak was also more than a freedom fighter. A socially sensitive leader, he endeavoured to create political awareness among the tribals and sensitize them about their fundamental rights. He also spread the message of adult education and the importance of abstinence and strived hard to bring about positive changes in the rural areas.

No one in our country can forget the invaluable contributions of the Prajamandal Movement in different parts of Orissa, including in Ranpur in which late Shaheed Raghunath Mohanty and Shaheed Dibakar Parida played the leading role. As you all know, when the national freedom struggle gained momentum, the rulers of the feudatory States solemnly professed their allegiance to the British government on condition of retaining autonomy by

paying a lump sum amount as annual tribute and obeying their instructions and dictates. The result was unmitigated suppression of the people by these rulers. Undoubtedly, such wanton disregard for human dignity and freedom agitated the ordinary people who revolted against the injustice and tyranny. The agitation snowballed into a major movement which ultimately shook the very foundations of the British empire in India.

Friends, it was the unwavering commitment of leaders like late Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab, Nabakrushna Chaudhary and the great Socialist leader and thinker Sarangadhar Das which helped to mobilize the people of this State to join the freedom struggle in large numbers in the later years. These pioneers effectively articulated the anguish and grievances of the people and at the same time made them aware of their rights and duties to the nation as well. I also recall the pivotal role played by the octogenarian Comrade, Banamali Das, who in fact spearheaded the Prajamandal Movement in the Nilagiri area in Balasore district in 1938. The same year, the success of the Prajamandal Movement was replicated in Talcher and Dhenkanal. Soon, Ranpur followed suit under the able and inspiring leadership of Raghunath Mohanty and Dibakar Parida. An embattled British administration finally ensured that these two great freedom fighters were hanged to death on 4 April 1941. However, the death of Mohanty and Parida could not silence the popular protest and the revolt against the British rule. When the country got Independence, it was indeed the most befitting tribute to the sacrifice and suffering of all our freedom fighters and martyrs.

Friends, I am indeed happy that such a function has been organized today to commemorate the sacrifices made by the heroes of our freedom struggle. I would, however, suggest that such functions should not end in mere tokenism; rather, they should rekindle our interest in the valorous fight against foreign rule and the values of sacrifice, suffering and patriotism exemplified and epitomized by our martyrs.

At the same time, we must also introspect where we stand as a nation, sixty years into Independence. Our freedom struggle was a glorious and shining chapter in the history of the oppressed people's fight against the forces of imperialism and colonialism. It was also a movement to secure for our people a control over their destinies, and to provide them with not merely political democracy but social and economic democracy as well. Six decades after freedom, we have to introspect seriously and ascertain where we have gained in consolidating our freedom and national integrity and where we have lagged behind in promoting the socio-economic development of our people. If we take a look at the human development indicators today, we all will agree that we have a long way to go to realize the goals that we had set for ourselves at the dawn of freedom. Equally importantly, we can also discern

several fissiparous and divisive tendencies which pose, in the name of religion or language or lack of development, a grave threat to the unity and integrity of our country. We need to make concerted efforts to reach the fruits of development to every segment of our society, especially the weaker and vulnerable sections; similarly, all stakeholders have to strive relentlessly to defeat the evil designs of divisive forces.

Today, we can derive inspiration from the heroes and martyrs of our freedom struggle who cast aside their personal comforts and made the supreme sacrifice in the cause of the nation. Their saga of courage, conviction and compassion should ever be the beacon for each one of us and the nation as a whole.

With these words, I once again pay my profound respects to these martyrs whose everlasting memory we are honouring today.

Thank you.

THE ENNOBLING VISION OF DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR*

I feel honoured to have the opportunity here to associate myself with the 116th Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, in the year of the 2551st Anniversary of the Maha-parinirvana of Gautam Buddha.

The message of Gautam Buddha has endured the passage of time and continues to resonate around the world, more than two and a half millennia later. For centuries, the life, spirituality and the teachings of Gautam Buddha have offered solace to millions of people across the world, and his teachings are an invaluable part of our proud national heritage. Gautam Buddha's uniqueness lay in the fact that he prescribed a moral code of conduct, based on love and compassion, which could enable any person to realize the Truth. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, in his book *Discovery of India*, described Gautam Buddha's approach to be '...like the breath of the fresh wind from the mountains after the stale air of metaphysical speculation'.

More than 2,500 years after Lord Gautam Buddha's Maha-parinirvana, we find his teachings still casting a lasting influence on the political and social priorities of our times. Mahatma Gandhi drew liberally from Gautam Buddha's spiritual legacy when he propounded his ideals of non-violence and social reform. Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, too, was deeply influenced by the egalitarianism and humanism of Gautam Buddha's teachings. He eventually embraced Buddhism because he was seeking, in his own words, '*Pragyan*, that is enlightenment; *Karuna*, that is compassion; and *Samata*, that is equality'. Both Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar, gave a new meaning and relevance to the ancient wisdom of Gautam Buddha.

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, affectionately called 'Baba Saheb' by millions of his admirers and followers, played a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of free India and left an indelible imprint on our national life and polity. The architect of our Constitution, the champion of the downtrodden, and a rebel against social and economic inequities, Dr. Amebdkar was rightly described by Mahatma Gandhi as 'a patriot of sterling worth'.

* At the 116th Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, India House, London (14 April 2007).

Born in a 'Mahar' family, Baba Saheb had to suffer the ugliest forms of caste oppression and social discrimination in his early days. But he fought against them with indomitable courage, and overcoming the twin social barriers of extreme poverty and caste prejudice, obtained a law degree and multiple doctorates in law, economics and political science from universities in the UK and USA.

Dr. Ambedkar was chiefly instrumental in creating a new awakening, a new sense of social significance and a unique sense of dignity and self-respect amongst a large section of our people who were otherwise placed at the lowest strata in our hierarchical social order. Endowed with extraordinary brilliance, great foresight, tenacious purpose and courage of conviction, Babasaheb inspired the deprived sections of our society to question the basis of the exploitative and degrading social milieu in which they lived and to stand up for their legitimate rights.

Baba Saheb's eminence as a national leader, jurist, constitutional expert and Parliamentarian was fully recognized when he was elected to Constituent Assembly in 1946, and appointed as the Chairman of Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution in August, 1947. Working prodigiously, literally burning the midnight oil, Dr. Ambedkar sat for 141 days to draw up the Draft Constitution of India. Being an economist, legal luminary and socialist, he was deeply aware that the Constitution was not merely a legal document but an organic entity, representing the aspirations of millions of our countrymen. Speaking on the vitality and endurability of the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar said, 'The Constitution as settled by the Drafting Committee is workable. It is flexible and it is strong enough to hold the country both in peace time and war time. Indeed, if I may say so, if things go wrong under the new Constitution, the reason will not be that we had a bad Constitution. What we will have to say is that man was vile'.

Dr. Ambedkar's attempt was to link the interest of the depressed classes and their liberation with the common national movement for freedom. Nationalism in him emerged out of his principled fight against both external domination and internal oppression. His view of nationalism not only contemplated the liberation of every country enslaved by colonial domination but also the freedom for all subjects and subjugated people even in free countries. He emphasized that without freedom that ensured the dignity of all individuals, social brotherhood cannot be achieved.

He believed that certain political rights alone did not constitute the basis of democracy. He perceived it as a form of social engineering, a way of life. The fundamental elements in the democracy of his concept were: liberty, equality, fraternity, reason, human experience, prevalence of rule of law, respect for natural rights, and an emphasis on the individual in social relationships.

On the inauguration of the Constitution, he declared in unequivocal terms that though India had attained equality in politics, there still existed inequality in social and economic life. In his concluding Address in the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar forcefully put forth his views in this regard. He said: 'We must make our political democracy a social democracy. It means a way of life, which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things'.

The Indian Constitution as given to us by Dr. Ambedkar is a unique affirmation of individual rights and social justice. Its great value lies in the fact that it guarantees social empowerment through constitutional and democratic means. Our unique path of achieving social and economic emancipation through peaceful and democratic means holds lessons for all societies in transition and for all countries striving to cope with social and economic disparities.

Dr. Ambedkar's role as a political leader and his intellectual contribution have become an integral part of our country's political evolution. He brought to the forefront of our nation's conscience, the deprivations suffered by a large section of our people due to our exploitative social system. More than anything else he will be remembered for his role in laying the institutional foundation of our Republic and for his heroic struggle for raising the downtrodden to a life of dignity and self-respect.

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya had correctly assessed Dr. Ambedkar's role in drafting our Constitution in the following words:

> What a steamroller intellect he brought to bear upon this magnificent and tremendous task; irresistible, unconquerable...; whatever he felt to be right he stood by, regardless of consequences.

In recognition of the distinguished services rendered by Dr. Ambedkar, the Government of India conferred on him the nation's highest award 'the Bharat Ratna' posthumously in 1990, and commemorated the centenary year of his birth in 1990-91 as the 'Year of Social Justice'.

Even today, Dr. Ambedkar's vision for a just and free society continues to guide political thought and action in India. The scheme for affirmative action or positive discrimination in favour of the weak, enjoys support of all political parties across the ideological spectrum. Drawing inspiration from Dr. Ambedkar's life — where education provided empowerment, the Indian State is paying special attention to making education, especially higher education, more accessible to the weaker sections of society.

However, administrative measures alone cannot bring about societal changes. There is a need to change our mind-sets too. This requires an all- encompassing political and cultural movement against various forms of injustice in our society. Ultimately, the battle for a just social order has to be waged and won in the minds of our people.

Today, there are thousands of young men and women in India whose lives mirror that of Baba Saheb. More and more talented young persons from the so-called backward castes are able to achieve recognition in different fields due to their merit despite disadvantages and discrimination faced by them. And that is because of their educational attainments. As this trickle becomes a flood, Indian Society and Economy will speedily become more just, more equalitarian, more inclusive and above all, more productive.

India's position as an emerging global power will lie in the manner it treats its weaker sections and its minorities, and in following a path of inclusive growth. The vision of Baba Saheb and his life continue to be a beacon light, showing us the way forward in our search for a just social order.

I thank the Indian High Commission and the Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organisations, U.K., for having invited me to this Function. I pay my humble tribute to the eternal teachings of Gautam Buddha, and to the indomitable courage, ennobling vision and exemplary leadership of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar. By remembering their seminal contribution to the evolution of society, we celebrate the highest attributes in man and re-affirm our faith in the Indian Nation.

Thank you.

THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE: A MOMENTOUS EVENT IN MODERN INDIAN HISTORY*

We have assembled here today to commemorate one of the most momentous events in modern Indian history — the 150th Anniversary of the First War of Independence. We are thankful to the Respected Rashtrapatiji, Respected Up-Rashtrapatiji and Hon'ble Pradhan Mantriji for gracing this function. I respectfully welcome them and also all other dignitaries who have gathered here in this historic Central Hall, which witnessed the birth of the Indian Nation State, at the end of a long drawn struggle against colonialism, nearly six decades back. On this solemn occasion, I join all of you in paying my humble tributes to the heroes and martyrs of 1857.

The great uprising of 1857 was undoubtedly an epoch-making event in India's struggle for freedom. Though the British imperialist rulers sought to downplay the great struggle as a mere sepoy mutiny, it was indeed India's First War of Independence in every sense, when people from every walk of life, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and language, rose as one against the might of the oppressive British rule. Driven by an intense sense of patriotism and unmindful of dire consequences, they valiantly fought against the British, and in the process willingly embraced untold hardship, retribution and even death.

The great resistance to the alien rule that began in Meerut in northern India sparked off a chain of uprisings across the country, against imperialist aggression and brutal and inhuman treatment. In fact, the plan was to launch a nation-wide rebellion on 31 May 1857 but the execution of Shaheed Mangal Pande at Barrackpore in Bengal on 8 April 1857 hastened the revolt. It was the eruption of an entire nation. The brave resistance put up by Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Nana Saheb Peshwa and Tantia Tope at Kanpur, Maulvi Ahmad-Ullah Shah and Begum Hazrat Mahal of Oudh, Khan Bahadur Khan at Bareilly, Kanwar Singh of Bihar and the supreme sacrifices of all those known and unknown heroes are an integral part of our freedom struggle and will always be written in letters of gold.

The First War of Independence might not have been successful in a military sense as the Britishers were able to put down the resistance by ruthless

* At the 150th Anniversary of First War of Independence, Central Hall, Parliament House, New Delhi (10 May 2007).

oppressive tactics and indiscriminate massacre of the fighters for freedom; but the people displayed indomitable courage and exceptional valour against a mighty empire, which a grateful nation recalls with the utmost reverence today.

Considering the socio-economic, political and administrative impact that the event had, history has truly acknowledged that the uprising consolidated the extreme yearning for Independence in the Indian people. In the words of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru; '...the events of 1857 did make an indelible impression on a very large part of the country... . It was an expression of resentment against the yoke of foreign rule and an attempt to get rid of it.' In many ways, to my mind, it marked the beginning of organised resistance against colonialism everywhere.

The most remarkable feature of our First War of Independence was the sense of unity displayed by all sections of the nation — a shining example of peaceful co-existence and inclusiveness which the country should always cherish and treasure. The 1857 War demonstrated that our people, irrespective of the factors that separated them from one another, wanted to live together, sharing each other's joys and sorrows. Today, let us solemnly pledge that we as a nation will follow that great example of unity and common action and fight against all attempts to undermine our national unity and integrity by divisive forces.

The message of our First War of Independence has inspired generations to continue the fight for liberation of our country from foreign rule. For them, India's independence was the first and immediate goal to be achieved for our country's full awakening and reconstruction. We, on this occasion, also pay homage to all our freedom fighters.

Following our Independence sixty years ago, we have made substantial progress in diverse fields and today we are a resurgent nation and the largest working democracy in the world. Our goal of meaningful socio-economic democracy can be accomplished only when all iniquities and deprivations are eradicated and our democracy becomes inclusive in every sense of the term. As a nation, we should resist efforts to divide us on the grounds of caste, creed, region or religion, and that will be the best way to pay our true homage to the great freedom fighters of our country.

As the spark that ignited the intense urge of our nation for freedom from foreign rule, the First War of Independence occupies a special place in the hearts and minds of our people. We rededicate ourselves to the lofty ideals and values for which they lived and died. Along with this programme, the Parliament has also taken the initiative to organize a Light and Sound show at the National Stadium to depict the heroism of the freedom fighters and

martyrs of 1857 and the saga that was the First War of Independence. I humbly invite all of you to please join the programme later this evening. Before I conclude, I once again thank the Respected Rashtrapatiji, Respected Up-Rashtrapatiji, Hon'ble Pradhan Mantriji and all other dignitaries for their gracious presence at this function.

Thank you.

REVOLT OF 1857: A WATERSHED IN INDIAN HISTORY*

Today, it is a red-letter day for us as we are commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the First War of Independence of 1857. The 1857 War of Independence is a watershed in Indian history. It was not merely a sepoy mutiny against the colonial rulers or a rebellion by some Princely States; it signalled the sparking off of the feeling of nationalism in the people of India and the emergence of an organized struggle against the British imperialism in India. In other words, seeds of the nationalism were sown in 1857 itself and watered by innumerable Indians with their blood which eventually crystallized and culminated into the formation of an independent Indian nation State in 1947. Mangal Pandey, Tantia Tope, Kanwar Singh, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Khan Bahadur Khan and Birsa Munda launched a united offensive to challenge the British rule and ignited the flame of a gigantic nationalistic movement across the country. Gradually this flame culminated into the conflagration of Indian National Movement, thus uprooting the British rule and giving birth to an independent India.

A grateful nation today, recalls the supreme sacrifices of those countless martyrs, known and unknown, who fought for our Independence and pays homage and obeisance to their indomitable courage. Independence was not given to us on a platter. We have achieved it after a long period of struggle and strife. Our young generation shall have to bear this fact in mind and constantly endeavour to safeguard this precious gift of Independence.

The freedom struggle of 1857 raised a fundamental question which is very much pertinent to us even today and that is: 'What is nationalism'? In simple words, it might connote immense dedication and love for one's nation. But the fact remains that nationalism can neither be confined within the parochial parameters of any definition nor can it be thrust on anyone. It is the voice of the soul, the innerself, which says that the nation is paramount. In order to arouse this feeling of nationalism amongst every Indian, it becomes necessary to ensure that the fruits of our progress and development reach every citizen and the weaker and disadvantaged sections of our society become

* At the 150th Anniversary of the First War of Independence, Red Fort, New Delhi (11 May 2007).

partners in our progress and prosperity. There is also a need to plug the gaping holes of disparity between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, the literate and the illiterate, man and woman as also address the divide of caste, creed and religion. For this purpose, we should avoid ideological differences and confrontations and deal with national issues unitedly through the process of democratic endeavour.

Let us, today, pledge at this place of historical importance in the presence of our tricolour that we shall forego and forget our mutual differences in order to become true Indians; that not withstanding our diversities, we shall be driven by the desire of co-existence and inclusiveness and bound by a single thread of Indianness like a beautiful garland of varied flowers, thus laying a strong foundation of nationalism on which the edifice of a prosperous, tolerant, powerful and glorious nation can be erected.

Let us resolve to build India into a nation of cultural diversities, having regard for ideological differences, paying special attention to the deprived sections of society and constantly and zealously guarding its democratic institutions and the fountainhead of its republic. This will be a befitting tribute to the martyrs of 1857 and it will instil a renewed zeal for strengthening India.

Thank you.

KARUNANIDHI: A MANY SPLENDOURED PERSONALITY*

It is a matter of great pleasure and an honour for me to have the opportunity to associate myself with this function organised to felicitate Kalaignar Dr. M. Karunanidhi on his long and eventful association with the Legislative Bodies of Tamil Nadu. At the very outset, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my distinguished friend Dr. Karunanidhi on this rare accomplishment.

It is undoubtedly a momentous occasion in the life of the outstanding leader who has played and continues to play a very significant role in the State of Tamil Nadu as also in our national politics. Dr. Karunanidhi has the unique distinction of having been elected to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly as many as 11 times. This is besides, his membership of the State Legislative Council in the mid 1980s. To be a member of a Legislature for such a long period of time is, indeed, a remarkable achievement, testifying to the high esteem in which the people hold him, which conclusively establishes Thiru Karunanidhi's popularity amongst the people of this progressive State and his great contribution for its speedy development.

His popularity and reach is not limited to any particular region or constituency as such. In fact, the whole State and, in a larger measure, the whole country has been his stage. His own electoral records reveal that whichever constituency he chose to contest from, the people have expressed their confidence in him and have extended him unhesitatingly the honour to represent them in the Assembly.

During his long innings in the Legislature, he has had the privilege of seeing the temper and tide of the House both from the Treasury and the Opposition Benches. He has held the august office of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu five times which in itself is a record for the State and in fact he has almost touched the record of his good friend Shri Jyoti Basu. He has thus had rich and varied experience as a member of the Legislature, as a Minister, as the Leader of the Opposition, as the Chief Minister and, above all, as the unquestioned leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Party he

* At the function to felicitate Dr. M. Karunanidhi on completing 50 years of his association with the Legislative Bodies in India, Tamil Nadu, Chennai (12 May 2007).

co-founded with some other great leaders, way back in 1949 and passionately nurtured ever since. And it adds lustre to his public life that he has discharged these varied responsibilities with great distinction.

As elected representatives of a progressive State and of a very dynamic and highly industrious people, the legislators of the State of Tamil Nadu have onerous responsibilities to shoulder. In Thiru Karunanidhi, they had and have a great leader and pathfinder to emulate. During his distinguished public life and as a member and leader of the State Legislature, Dr. Karunanidhi has earned tremendous goodwill and enormous support of the people and his constituents. He has overcome, time and again, all hurdles in retaining the trust and faith of the people, which eloquently speaks of his charisma and public appeal.

Thiru Karunanidhi's life and times is a shining example of the great virtues of service, of dedication and commitment, always remaining accessible to the people, sharing their sorrows and joys and in being pro-active in addressing their grievances. Even at the pinnacle of his political career and success, he has not lost touch with the man on the street — he continues to be in close communion with grassroot workers, always fighting for their cause, particularly of those belonging to the weaker and the vulnerable sections of society.

The record of his performance over the past nearly four decades, as the President of the Party, has indeed been most commendable. He is the true link between the leaders and the workers of his generation and those belonging to the present generation. All these years, he has, in fact, been a source of inspiration for generations of public-spirited people, young and old alike, in involving themselves in public affairs. The high level of political awareness, and the healthy political culture that the people of Tamil Nadu have been demonstrating can be attributed equally to the ceaseless and committed efforts of leaders like Dr. Karunanidhi and to the wisdom, maturity and to the sense of responsibility of the people of the State. Under such enlightened leadership, the people of this State have been making significant contributions towards the development of the State and to nation-building.

As a charismatic mass leader, Dr. Karunanidhi occupies a special place in the hearts and minds of the people of Tamil Nadu. A man of compassion, and commitment to public causes, he is among those select few who have always remained wedded to certain principles and ideals and ever ready to make any sacrifice for defending them against onslaught of any kind. The saga of his life symbolizes a spirit of sacrifice, of courage of conviction and a rare sensitivity to the cause of the poor and the deprived. As the Chief Minister, five times in the past nearly three and a half decades, he has not only spearheaded a socio-economic revolution in the State, but also laid

a firm foundation for a modern Tamil Nadu, by introducing many path-breaking schemes and enacting pioneering legislative measures. It is known that it was Thiru Karunanidhi who constituted a Backward Classes Commission in the State, the first of its kind anywhere in India. He has always given special attention to the problems being faced by the deprived and the downtrodden and he set up a separate Ministry for specially looking into their matters way back in 1989. It is his farsightedness and sagacity which have enabled the State of Tamil Nadu to produce commendable results on various developmental parameters in recent decades.

Deeply committed to secularism, a progressive social order, and other larger national values, Dr. Karunanidhi's model of development has been an all inclusive one. He views politics as a means for social transformation and as a potent instrument for development and growth. He believes that the State has a moral obligation to uplift the vulnerable sections of society and that they cannot be left alone to protect themselves. He has initiated several progressive measures for their uplift. His initiative to provide spectacles to the needy among the poor strata of society, for free surgeries in hospitals, for the abolition of hand-pulled rickshaws and for the free distribution of cycle rickshaws, for providing developed land free of cost to the landless agricultural families, legislation for equal property rights for women, for free education for the girl child, marriage-grant for poor girls, among others, are just a few examples of his empathy with the poor, the women and the downtrodden. Homes for the homeless, highly subsidized foodgrains to the poor, television sets and cooking gas connections and gas stoves to the poor households which do not have these facilities, rehabilitation of beggars, etc., are some of the issues which he has proactively addressed and has found solutions, always in favour of the vulnerable sections of the society.

As a crusader for the welfare of the weaker sections, Thiru Karunanidhi has made seminal contributions for their socio-economic empowerment, both as a legislator and as an administrator. Needless to say, such affirmative action is a prerequisite for building an equitable, egalitarian and inclusive society. As a tireless champion of the Dravidian identity, he has very adroitly used his oratorical and literary excellence to disseminate the egalitarian and rationalist ideals of the Dravidian movement, as articulated by the great leader, the legendary Annadurai. Thiru Karunanidhi held aloft the torch of social empowerment with great zeal and commitment all these years. As a socially sensitive leader, he ensured that men belonging to all castes could become priests in the Hindu temples. In a way, indeed, he has been a great social reformer too, whose contributions in facilitating a classless and casteless society will always be remembered.

Dr. Karunanidhi has also contributed significantly to the success of both coalition governance and cooperative federalism in the country. He firmly believes that only a union of strong States can make a strong Union. At the national level, he has been contributing immensely to the strengthening of the federal polity by fighting for the rightful place of the States of the Union without compromising with national unity and integrity. For him, decentralization is both a political and an economic necessity in a diverse society like ours. It is worth recalling what he said about decentralization, while speaking at the National Development Council meeting in May 1972:

> Decentralization is particularly necessary if a large country like ours is to cope with the problems of a modern economy. It is in this sense that our demand for State autonomy should be understood — as a request for more efficient management of the country's resources, as a means to enable the Centre to be strong in areas of vital national concern, as a method of enabling the minimum demands of our people to be met in the quickest time and in the most efficient manner.

Indeed, these views show his great statesmanship and his efforts to strengthen the federal structure of our country. Dr. Karunanidhi is totally committed to national unity and integrity. His poetic observations in the State Legislative Assembly on 16 April 1974, while articulating his Government's views on the Rajamannar Committee appointed by the Tamil Nadu Government on the issue of State autonomy, are equally eloquent:

> The National Flag of India flutters in the glittering sun. We lift our eyes to the high skies beyond the clouds in our attempt to enjoy the majesty of the Flag. We hear the National Anthem composed by Tagore, the golden voice of Bengal. The sweet melody of the Anthem rings in our ears like the soft music of the Courtallam Falls. Yes! Our country has awaken from its slavery liberating itself from foreign domination. The epic story of our heroic struggle for liberation of India from which we emerged, holding our heads high, is writ large in the history of the world.

Dr. Karunanidhi is verily a versatile personality, who encompasses in his repertoire the supreme attributes of an eminent litterateur, a prolific scriptwriter, and a consummate orator known for his quick wit and repartee. His contribution to Tamil literature covers a wide canvass covering poetry, drama, fiction, short stories and cinema. Through his sensitive writings, Dr. Karunanidhi has used literature as a potent weapon against the exploitative social order and to articulate the cause of the poor and the deprived. I have had the honour of writing the Foreword to the English translation of

Thiru Karunanidhi's poetic version in Tamil of Maxim Gorky's eternal classic *Mother* and going through this work was, I must say, a very rewarding experience indeed.

Dr. Karunanidhi's mastery over language and literature has also had its impact on his oratorical brilliance, enabling him to strike the right chord with the people. I am given to understand that so far he has addressed more than ten thousand public meetings, special meetings, seminars and conferences. I am sure the Chambers of the Tamil Nadu Legislature will always resonate and reverberate with the masterly speeches, on many issues of the times, delivered by Dr. Karunanidhi.

The numerous awards and the honorific titles he has earned over the years speak volumes about his learning, scholarship and the love and respect that he enjoys in the country. But beyond these awards and honours stand the man who is Thiru Karunanidhi, 'Kalaignar' to his people, a leader of the masses, a champion of the poor and the working class, an eloquent articulator and defender of the larger national values, an advocate of inclusive development and one who commands immense respect across political ideologies and party manifestoes in the country.

Being a legislator is at once a privilege and an honour, which also brings with it certain rights as well as responsibilities. It is through the elected representatives that the sovereign will of the people finds expression in our Legislative Bodies. The trust and faith which the people have reposed in us need to be justified with sincerity and commitment to their welfare. As people's representatives, we all are entrusted with the challenging task of keeping the flame of democracy burning bright. And Thiru Karunanidhi's legislative career has been a shining example of such commitment to the people, which should be a beacon for legislators everywhere.

The parliamentary system of governance for our country was decided upon by the Founding Fathers of our Constitution as the most suitable method for the progress and development of our people. In this system, the legislative bodies are the most important institutions which the people elect and expect that their representatives will discharge their duties with commitment, sincerity and probity. It is a matter of greatest concern that, of late, the people are getting disillusioned, if not cynical, about the way the different Legislatures are functioning in our country, which is greatly weakening the foundations of our polity and indeed our whole political structure itself. I urge upon the legislators in our country, with all humility, to introspect and see whether they are contributing towards strengthening the system or not and whether they are honourning their electors or not, as they are the real masters.

Friends, Thiru Karunanidhi is respected and revered for his many accomplishments and for his sterling public service by the people of Tamil Nadu and is held in high esteem by the nation. His many splendoured contributions to our national life have made him a legend in his own life time. More than anything else, he is truly a people's leader who has brilliantly used the hall of the Tamil Nadu Legislature to effectively articulate the concerns, aspirations and urges of the people whom he represents in an exemplary manner. I join all of you in felicitating this outstanding leader of the masses on this momentous occasion. With these words, I wish Thiru Karunanidhi the best of health and many more years of service to the nation.

Thank you.

MRINALINI SARABHAI: A LIFE DEDICATED TO MUSIC AND DANCE*

It gives me immense pleasure to be here this evening among so many distinguished persons from the world of art and to be asked to give away the prestigious Life Time Achievement Awards for contributions in the field of arts, instituted by the reputed organization, the Legends of India. At the outset, I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai and Pandit Buddhadeb Das Gupta, for being chosen for this prestigious award for their distinctive contributions in the field of dance and music. It is indeed a well-deserved recognition for both of them for their sustained dedication and devotion to art and culture. Both of them have more than six decades' long association with their respective fields. I heartily commend the efforts of the organizers for instituting this award to honour deserving artists from various fields.

In today's world there is a tendency to venerate and worship tradition for its own sake. But going beyond that, to achieve progress we need to experiment with new ideas and adapt ourselves to changes taking place around us. As one understands, art must develop from practical human needs. Art actually is expected to mirror life itself. We need to applaud and encourage the artist who strives to bring new meaning to the form of art he or she practises and not the form itself.

I understand, this is what the Legends of India Lifetime Achievement Awards do by honouring artists who demonstrate originality and innovativeness within the formal structures of their own chosen forms and thereby breathe new life into them and make the traditional forms more vibrant and receptive to the newer generations. The Selection Committee, I am told, has strict parameters and only those who have made significant contributions in making their art form popular are given this award. The recipients of the award this year amply justify that claim, in the process enhancing the value of the award itself.

It is the second time in the last one year, that I am honoured to confer an award on Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai. In October last year, she received another prestigious award in Kerala and it was a great privilege for me to present the

* At the Ninth Annual Legends of India Sangeet Festival at the Park Hotel, New Delhi (17 May 2007).

same to her. She is undoubtedly one of India's most celebrated dancers and choreographers who has achieved international fame and recognition unmatched by any contemporary Indian classical dancer. Through a life characterized by unusual activism in diverse areas and passionate commitment to social causes, she has created a niche for herself in the socio-cultural life of the country.

Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai's contributions as a dancer, choreographer, poet, writer, environmentalist, humanist and teacher have been quite distinctive. In all the different roles, she has been a role model for everyone, and in everything she does, she personifies the best in our culture and tradition.

The contributions she has been making in the field of art and culture through the *Darpana* Academy of Performing Arts, which she founded nearly six decades back, on the banks of the Sabarmati, are indeed immeasurable. A true Gandhian, she also established the Centre for Non-Violence through Performing Arts, which seeks to spread the message of peace and non-violence through the arts, as part of *Darpana*. Committed as she is to secular values and to India's unity and integrity, she has been uncompromising in her fight against the communal forces in the country. As an artiste, she has always striven to express her fearless views through her chosen art form of dance and as a social activist she has consistently been the voice of the voiceless.

She is one of the very few surviving disciples of Gurudev Tagore. Her father, Shri Swaminathan had chosen Shantiniketan, for his daughter's early upbringing, and as the Member of Parliament from that hallowed place, it is all the more a matter of pride for me to be here and to present this prestigious award to Smt. Sarabhai. She is already a recipient of several prestigious national and international awards and recognitions—in fact, it is difficult to keep count of them and today's Award is yet another important addition to the list.

The achievements and contributions of Shri Buddhadev Das Gupta are equally commendable. As a disciple of Pandit Radhika Mohan Maitra, he received the best training and he came in close contact with the greatest exponents of music at that time. He is the first to take *sarod* out of the country to the European audience way back in 1954. It is not given to many to be able to combine the pressures of a professional life as an engineer of great merit with the passion for music. He has done it very effectively. His commitment to art and his chosen field can be gauged from the fact that he devotes a lot of his time, for teaching the young ones this captivating form of music. He received the prestigious Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1993, which was conferred on him by the President of India. He was a student of Mitra Institute (Bhowanipore) in Kolkata where I also had the privilege to study and that makes me specially proud on his receiving today's award.

Friends, while art and culture have universal appeal, we would do well to treasure our traditions and heritage even while enjoying the best from the rest of the world. For that to happen, we must inculcate a taste and temperament especially among the younger generations for Indian music and culture, which are second to none. In such endeavours, Legends of India is playing an important role. As an organisation committed to promoting creative arts, the Legends of India, deserves to be complimented and supported. It has presented some of the most enchanting music, theatre and art festivals across our different cities. This is a commendable effort and I congratulate Shri Dipayan Mazumdar and Ms. Krishna Bhadra for their personal contribution to this cause. It is time that more such organizations and people take up the challenge.

This evening is going to resonate with sweet melody soon and it is not my intention to stand between the audience, which is eagerly waiting for the performance and the accomplished artists.

With these few words, I once again congratulate the winners of the Legends of India Lifetime Achievement Awards and wish them continued success in the years ahead.

Thank you.

VISHWANATH PRATAP SINGH: HIS CREATIVE AND ENNOBLING DIMENSIONS*

It is, indeed, a matter of great privilege for me to have been invited to release the Coffee Table Book on my good friend and the former distinguished Prime Minister Shri Vishwanath Pratap Singhji. Though belonging to a royal family, he has dedicated his life fighting for the downtrodden and the marginalized strata of the society. As a legislator and parliamentarian, as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, as Union Minister and eventually as the Prime Minister of India, he lent his forceful voice on behalf of the weak and the vulnerable. It is to his credit and his humaneness that in spite of his indifferent health, V. P. Singhji continues to espouse their cause with relentless zeal.

An intensely sensitive and compassionate human being who plunged into politics to build an inclusive and egalitarian society, his goal has been to empower the marginalized strata of society and integrate them into the mainstream. Fighting for social justice has been the guiding gospel of all his policies and actions.

For him, politics is not only about power; it is about social justice, secularism and democratic rights of the people in general and the deprived in particular.

Behind the exterior of his political personality and his public life, there lies yet another creative and ennobling dimension of his life. In his twin pursuit of poetry and painting, Vishwanath Pratap Singhji has found solace away from the rough and tumble of politics. V. P. Singhji's poetry and paintings depict the trials and the travails of life in motion; they are as eloquent as they are thought-provoking. In his paintings and poetry, as one can notice, V. P. Singhji tries to give an outlet to his agony and ecstasy.

It is always a rare combination to be both a painter and poet and active in politics. But Vishwanathji, besides being a poet and painter, is primarily a humane politician. For a sensitive human being like him, his creations are a reflection of the dialectics of the society and the polity.

* At the Release of a Coffee Table book on Shri V.P. Singh, New Delhi, (11 August 2007).

In the preface of the volume, Kunwar Pragy Arya very appropriately writes that V.P. Singhji's 'art and poetry reflect his sensitivity, compassion and revolutionary outlook and create a climate favourable to the pursuit of social justice' and that 'there is a sense of emotional satisfaction from interacting with the masses, a poetic rapport is established with them, and a yearning to bring about fundamental changes in their lives'.

Coffee Table Books have their own importance. They should not be treated as mere decorative pieces adding to the décor and ambience of the drawing room or pedantic display of intellect; they are indeed sources of vital information on many important topics and subjects which help in disseminating information and form the basis of initiating discussions on the subjects dealt with by them.

This volume is a very valuable collection of some of V.P. Singhji's very rare paintings and writings; there are also some very interesting photographs of past events capturing special moments in his illustrious life. His poems, both in Hindi and English, portray his vibrant thoughts and vivid ideas. The art section of the volume has a very rich content consisting of some of his best art pieces such as wash paintings, watercolour landscapes, charcoal drawings and works in oil on canvas. The beauty of the volume lies in the fact that at many places, the paintings come alive in perfect synchrony and synergy. While his paintings are a treat to the eyes of the beholder, his free-flowing poems transport the reader to a higher plane of sublime bliss.

V.P. Singhji's paintings have been exhibited, among other places, at the Nehru Centre, London, the Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai and at the Kerala Lalit Kala Akademi, Thiruvananthapuram, besides at the Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, New Delhi, and the Atelier Art Gallery, Gurgaon. As the lovers of art know more than anybody else, the exhibition of his paintings across the world has evoked very good response and has been covered extensively in the media as well.

I take this opportunity to heartily felicitate V.P. Singhji on his many accomplishments and more specifically, on his artistic achievements. One finds that in this beautiful book, the sensitivity and humaneness of V.P. Singhji comes out evocatively in the subjects dear to him: Politics, Poetry and Painting. I extend my heartiest greetings to Shri V.P. Singhji, and wish him good health so that he can continue with what he calls as his 'rapturous communion' with nature. I would also like to compliment Shri Suneet Chopra, the distinguished columnist, and Kunwar Pragy Arya, for their painstaking efforts in bringing out this Coffee Table Book. I understand that it is their personal tribute to V.P. Singhji on the occasion of his 75th birth anniversary which fell on 25 June and I wish him good health and a long life in the service of the people.

With these words, I have great pleasure in releasing this volume. I am sure Shri V.P. Singhji will continue to pursue his ideals and, at the same time, enjoy his creative writings, poems and paintings.

Thanking you.

BAL RAM JAKHAR: A DISTINGUISHED PARLIAMENTARIAN*

I am indeed delighted to be amidst you and to associate myself with the 85th Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Dr. Bal Ram Jakhar, Hon'ble Governor of Madhya Pradesh, one of my illustrious predecessors in the office of the Speaker and a good friend for long. I would like to thank the organizers of this function for the opportunity, I have been given to join you in felicitating Dr. Jakhar on this happy occasion.

As a national leader and a distinguished public figure, Dr. Bal Ram Jakhar is greatly respected by all, irrespective of their political and ideological leanings. In his public career spanning over several decades, he has held important positions at the national and State levels and has enriched our political, social and national life in varied ways.

Dr. Jakhar has the distinction of having been chosen to preside over the highest representative body of the country, in his very first term as a member. As one of my distinguished predecessors in that office, he has added lustre to it, always endeavouring to ensure smooth and orderly conduct of the business of the House, taking everyone along. He discharged his duties and responsibilities with great ability and tact and always enforced the supremacy of the House without any political bias or preference. His amiable disposition and sense of wit and humour endeared him to all sections of the House.

During his Speakership, for the first time after 1952, a comprehensive review of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha was undertaken in 1989 under his initiative and several changes were formalised and incorporated into the Rules. Dr. Jakhar also took the commendable initiative of revamping the Committee System with a view to further ensuring Executive accountability to the Parliament. The Departmentally Related Standing Committee System introduced during the Tenth Lok Sabha was really the follow-up of the original Subject Committee System that Dr. Jakhar introduced in August-September 1989, after years of deliberations during the tenure of the Seventh and the Eighth Lok Sabhas. Similarly, the initial steps for the computerization and automation of the services to the members of Parliament were also taken during his Speakership.

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* At the function to felicitate Dr. Bal Ram Jakhar, Governor of Madhya Pradesh, on his 85th Birth Anniversary, New Delhi (7 September 2007).

Dr. Jakhar also has the distinction of being the only Speaker in Independent India's history to have presided over two successive Lok Sabhas for their full term. After having been in that seat for over the past three years now, I can understand what stamina, patience and perseverance, he is actually endowed with!

His tenure as the Union Minister of Agriculture, during 1991-96, gave Dr. Jakhar the opportunity to put his grass-root experience as a farmer to the best use in the larger interest of the country. He vigorously espoused the cause of the farmers both in the Parliament and the Government and always worked for the development of agriculture and the benefit of the agriculturists. I am sure the country will continue to benefit from his experience and expertise in stimulating agricultural growth, particularly at a time when the farm sector is passing through a crisis. His laudable contributions to the farm sector was befittingly recognized when he was conferred the honour of the All India Udyan Pandit by the President of India as early as in 1975. Besides, he was conferred the honorary degrees of Doctor of Science and Vidya Martand, respectively, by the Haryana Agriculture University and the Gurukul Kangri Viswa-Vidyalaya.

As the Governor of Madhya Pradesh, the dynamism and concern for the welfare of the people that he has been demonstrating have added grace to the important constitutional position he is holding. Dr. Jakhar has brought great dignity to our public life as a national leader of long standing, as the Speaker of Lok Sabha for nearly a decade, as an accomplished administrator, as Governor and as an activist farmer. He has ceaselessly striven over, a span of several decades, to strengthen the forces of national integration with a view to building an inclusive and egalitarian society.

Today, on the occasion of his 85th Birthday, I convey my hearty greetings and warm felicitations to him and wish him a long and healthy life and many more fruitful years in the service of the nation and the people.

Thank you.

SHAHEED BHAGAT SINGH: A TRUE REVOLUTIONARY*

It is indeed a matter of great honour to me to have been asked to release the book on the life of one of the greatest heroes of our freedom movement, Shaheed Bhagat Singh. Shri Nayar has been associated with diverse fields of activity like journalism, literature, diplomacy and parliamentary career and a very active public life and he has made a mark on all of them.

Shri Nayar's latest creation, *Without Fear* has made us all grateful to him for a most incisive assessment of the life and philosophy of one of our greatest revolutionaries, written with painstaking research and commitment to place before the people his illuminating analysis of the principles and objectives which inspired Shaheed Bhagat Singh to lay down his life to the cause of independence. Through this book we get thorough knowledge of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, the man, the leader, the revolutionary and the uncompromising patriot. There are not many writings which can match the sweep and scope of Shri Nayar's work.

Through this book, the learned author has not only recounted the general socio-economic conditions in the first quarter of the previous century in which the great patriot was born, but has also set out the views of Bhagat Singh himself on diverse issues of his times, of his world views and of his understanding of all the contradictions in our society. The way he had perceived the socio-economic reality of India, the role of the colonial rulers in the underdevelopment of the country, the relationship between the economic inequity and the political changes are all revealed very clearly in the book.

Shri Nayar has very ably assessed the psyche of a true revolutionary and has drawn a clear distinction between the terrorist and a revolutionary.

Kuldipji, if I may say so, has very ably portrayed the man, the revolutionary and visionary leader, the passionate freedom fighter, the socialist thinker, and every facet of Bhagat Singh's life which will fascinate all and the very extensive sources referred to by the author make this book on the life of Bhagat Singh unique and authentic.

* At the release of the book, *Without Fear* on Shaheed Bhagat Singh by Shri Kuldip Nayar, New Delhi (28 September 2007).

Bhagat Singh's concern was not limited to winning freedom. He had a vision for post-independent India – a people-centric vision of a secular society and of a progressive India. His intellectual accomplishments were not known to many when he was executed by the colonial rulers in 1931. In his comments to his mother that: 'Ma, I have no doubt that my country will be one day free. But I am afraid that the brown sahibs are going to sit in the chairs the white sahibs will vacate', his own anxieties about the India that could emerge after freedom and his long-term vision for the country was clearly revealed. Shri Nayar has succeeded in projecting Bhagat Singh, the hero, as he really was, and has placed him at a pedestal where he indeed belonged.

Bhagat Singh's courage had inspired many, particularly the youth, and he and his comrades came to occupy a special position in the hearts and minds of the people.

We cannot recall any other name in world history who, at the young age of twenty-four, exerted so much of an impact on the world around him and earned such love and admiration from his countrymen as has Shaheed Bhagat Singh. He became a national icon at a young age, not just because he became a martyr in the cause of the country's freedom, but I think it had as such to do with his sense of history, with his broad national vision, his socialistic views with his concern for the underdogs in our society as also for the momentum that his martyrdom provided to our Freedom Movement at a crucial stage in its history. A secular-socialist vision for the country was central to Bhagat Singh's thinking.

Shri Nayar drives home this point, with a very apt quotation from Bhagat Singh himself:

> A branch of a peepal tree is cut and religious feelings of the Hindus are injured; a corner of a paper, *tazia* of the idol-breaker Mohammedans is broken and 'Allah' gets enraged .... Man ought to be given more importance than animals and, yet, here in India, they break each other's heads in the name of 'sacred animals'.

Before enrolment, every member of the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, that he and his comrades had founded, had to sign a pledge that he or she would place the interest of the country above that of the community. The manner in which he stirred the imagination of the people across the country, particularly its youth, was something that the Britishers were not prepared for.

Bhagat Singh had visualized a united India free from communalism and casteism, superstitions, reactionary values and moribund traditions. He always separated religion from politics and the State. Referring to the Ghadar Party's movement, he wrote in one of his articles: 'The martyrs kept religion outside

politics. Their conception was that religion was the private matter of individuals. Others should not interfere in that, nor should it be injected into politics.

The learned author has approached the subject of his book – the life, time and ideals of Bhagat Singh, with real fervour and passion.

It is the work of someone who has lived through the ups and downs of both the freedom movement and of the march of free India. In more ways than one, Shri Nayar has been one of the activists in that march and one who has walked by the values that our Founding Fathers cherished. The book is an excellent token of love and admiration to one of the greatest heroes of our freedom movement in his birth centenary year. I believe those who are interested in getting an authoritative account of the life of Bhagat Singh and of his times, will not miss reading the book.

Thank you.

KALIPATNAM RAMA RAO: A LIFE DEDICATED TO TELUGU LITERATURE*

I congratulate the organizers for the function to felicitate the eminent Telugu writer Shri Kalipatnam Rama Rao. I sincerely regret that due to my indisposition and under medical advise, I have been unable to attend this important function. I thank the organizers for their kind invitation. The Loknayak Foundation and the Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Hindi Academy, Dr. Y. Lakshmi Prasad deserve due appreciation for honouring renowned writers of Andhra Pradesh every year on the occasion of the death anniversary of Late Shri N.T. Rama Rao, the hero of the masses in his reel life, who later became their hero in real life too.

I am very happy to note that the function is being organized in the prestigious Andhra University campus, which has given the Parliament of India two distinguished Presiding Officers. Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, a former Vice-Chancellor of this University, adorned the office of the Chairman, Rajya Sabha with distinction for two terms, before his elevation to the Highest Office of the country. The 12th and 13th Lok Sabhas had the privilege of having Shri G.M.C. Balayogi, an alumni of this University, as Speaker.

Telugu literature is one of the oldest literatures of India having a rich reserve of stories, dramas, epics and poems. It reflects the rich cultural and traditional history of Andhra Pradesh, a State blessed with many outstanding writers who have immensely contributed to the enrichment of Telugu language. Shri Kalipatnam Rama Rao, affectionately called *'Ka Ra Mastaru'* in the Telugu literary world, is one such luminary who has had an ennobling literary career spanning nearly six decades.

Shri Rama Rao's writings reflect the social milieu of his own moorings, of the real life, experiences and difficulties he encountered in his younger days. It is these real-life experiences that equipped him to view the society around him with a critical eye, distancing himself from the class and caste system prevalent then and with immense love and affection for the poor and the downtrodden. His great story *'Yagnam'* which he wrote way back in 1964, for which he was honoured with the prestigious the Central Sahitya Academy Award, poignantly depicted the feudal set up in a village. Shri Rama Rao's

* At the Function to felicitate Shri Kalipatnam Rama Rao, Vishakhapatnam (18 January 2008).

stories are indeed incisive reflections on the social structure, conditions and class system of the times which unfortunately conditioned social behaviour and preferences than other higher values. In fact, Shri Rama Rao's stories have left a deep impact on the readers and his felicitous writings have won him a very large number of admirers. Thanks to the translation of his works into Russian, English and many Indian languages, his stories have touched a deep chord among people far and wide.

One can find that Shri Rama Rao's writings have been mostly inspired by the hardships faced by the common man and his internal struggles with the existing societal forces. Through his sensitive writings, Shri Rama Rao has used literature as a potent weapon against the exploitative social order and to articulate the cause of the people living with many inhuman social realities. Admirably, Shri Rama Rao's current poject *'Katha Nilayam'* is a unique endeavour to establish, in his hometown Srikakulam, a Library of stories of leading languages of the world. Since he has been working on this project with a missionary zeal, I am sure this project, when completed, will become a veritable storehouse of stories and will help conserve the precious story literature to posterity. Certainly, the generations to come will be eternally grateful to him for this unique Library of stories. I am told that his Library already has a stock of some 6000 books, anthologies, magazines and numerous entries in other formats. This is, no doubt, a good collection by any means and I am sure he will receive the necessary encouragement from all quarters in taking forward his dream project.

We all know that literature knows no boundaries. Despite the cultural and linguistic diversity which we all celebrate, we in India have shared a common past, irrespective of our regional identities, and we all have a somewhat similar social structure, facing diverse problems, some similar in nature, in every region of our country. After all, man and his emotions remain fundamentally the same everywhere and sensitive literature is what touches a chord in every sensitive human being. That is why it comes as no surprise to me to know that the translated version of Bengali literature has made a deep impact on the Telugu readers and writers. As you all know, substantial Bengali literature has been liberally translated into Telugu. One of the foremost personalities among the great Bengali writers who influenced the Telugu literature had been none other than Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore himself. Tagore's influence on Telugu literature can be traced back to as early as the 1890s. Acceptably, his influence on the poets of modern Telugu literature has been quite significant.

Another Bengali literary giant who had considerable influence on Telugu literature and whose themes and characters are quite familiar to the Telugu readers is Sarat Chandra. I am glad to know that his translated works still

remain best-sellers in Telugu. I am sure that similar translations of great Telugu works into Bengali and other regional languages will become quite popular among the discerning readers across the country.

Writers and littérateurs, no doubt, make a deep impact on society through their profound observations and sensitive portrayal of the problems of its various strata. As members of society, writers are carriers of a particular history and culture and their writings reflect the strength of society, its warts and blemishes, as well as its future directions. In fact, the writers perform a noble role; from time immemorial, they have served the twin purpose—entertaining readers on the one hand and encouraging the sensitive ones to change the course of their lives, on the other.

Men and women of letters are well placed to foster the spirit of co-existence and national integration the significance and relevance of which in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country like ours can hardly be over-emphasized. In a world which is getting easily polarized around divisive issues, it is the duty of writers and intellectuals to help bring people together irrespective of any narrow consideration of caste, creed and religion and to fill their lives with higher social and ethical values and norms. The writers also have a role in sensitizing people about the dangers of the various aberrations beginning to be seen in our socio-political life and in sustaining people's faith in our democracy and its institutions.

It cannot be denied that writers often do not get due recognition and appreciation that should rightfully be theirs. Under such circumstances, the need to encourage and appreciate good writers cannot be underestimated and the efforts of Dr. Y. Lakshmi Prasad in this context deserve to be commended. An eminent parliamentarian, a renowned academician, an acknowledged social activist, and a writer of repute Dr. Prasad is indeed a multi-faceted personality. His translation of Bhishma Sahni's famous novel *'Tamas'* into Telugu, which earned him the Central Sahitya Academy Award in 1972, was a commendable endeavour and a valuable addition for the Telugu readers. His initiative to felicitate great litterateurs of Telugu language is worthy of great acclaim.

Friends, today we are also observing the death anniversary of one of the greatest sons of Andhra Pradesh, Shri N.T. Rama Rao. I consider NTR as not only a versatile actor, director and producer but also a great leader who carved out a permanent place in the hearts of millions of Telugu people all over the world. His unique and natural style of acting characterized by ease and originality has inspired generations of actors and hopefuls and still continue to do so even today. Endowed with an enormous sense of pride in being Telugu, his respect towards his people and his mother tongue was the base to his popularity. His broad national vision and the courage of conviction

made him a leader of national stature and the role he played in the national politics at a critical juncture in its recent history was indeed praiseworthy. He was an institution by himself and an embodiment of discipline, self-respect and value-based life. I take this opportunity to pay my respectful regards to his memory today.

I once again congratulate Shri Kalipatnam Rama Rao for his exceptional literary achievements and extend my best wishes for the success of his dream project *'Katha Nilayam'*. I am sure that the varied dimensions of Shri Rama Rao's work will go beyond the present generation and will continue to guide many more in their search of the evolution of Telugu stories. I wish him the best of health and many more years of service to the Telugu literature. I wholeheartedly appreciate the efforts of Dr. Y. Lakshmi Prasad who, after his retirement as member of Parliament, has taken up this task of encouraging writers in various ways.

Thank you.

SANT KABIR: SYMBOL OF UNIVERSALISM*

I am grateful to Kabirpanthi Pramukh, Shri Vivekdas Acharya Ji, for giving me the opportunity to associate myself with this function and to lay the Foundation Stone of Kabir Smarak in this historic city. The Lahartara Tank, associated with the birth of the great humanist and a holy man, Sant Kabir is of much historic importance for our country. His foster parents—Neeru and Neema—took baby Kabir from here and as such this place came to be known for the great impact that Kabir came to make in later years on human civilization by showing the right path of living and is today an important place of pilgrimage for many. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that the Kabir Smarak should be set up here itself. I extend my compliments to all, particularly to my good friend and colleague, Shri Devendra Prasad Yadav Ji, for their initiatives in establishing this memorial here.

During the 14th and 15th Centuries there was a tremendous social ferment out of which emerged some of the greatest reformers of our country. Kabir, brought up in very humble surroundings, by a family of weavers, was one such great reformer. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in his *Discovery of India*, has described the developments and ethos of the times, in the following words:

> "The influence of these reformers went far beyond the limits of the particular sects that grew up after them. Hinduism as a whole felt the impact of the new ideas, and Islam in India also became somewhat different from what it was elsewhere. The fierce monotheism of Islam influenced Hinduism, and the vague pantheistic attitude of the Hindu had its effect on the Indian Muslim.... Muslim mysticism and Sufism which probably had its beginnings in the neo-Platonism grew."

In the 14th Century when Kabir was born, Indian society was faced with serious crisis and was going through a great deal of turmoil caused by religious hypocrisy, inequality, casteism, degrading customs and traditions and hollow ritualism. There were also deep divisions between the followers of the different religions and during this dark period, Sant Kabir emerged and awakened the masses through his teachings of brotherhood and a unique style of mysticism.

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* At the function to lay the Foundation Stone of Kabir Smarak, Varanasi (5 June 2008).

Kabir was never formally educated and was believed to be illiterate but he occupies a pre-eminent place in the history of our country, for the remarkable transformation he was instrumental in bringing about in our society through his positive ideas and teachings. His place in our socio-religious landscape is also unique: to the Hindus, he is a *Vaishnav bhakta*, to the Muslims a *pir*, to the Sikhs a *bhagat*, to the *Kabirpanthis* an *avatar* of the Supreme Being, and to the Neo-Vedantists, a promoter of the 'Universal Religion' or the 'Religion of Man', who steadfastly opposed superstitious beliefs, irrational customs, traditions and rituals which characterized religion during the medieval times. The Christians too recognize him as a teacher in whose teachings they find resonance of the humanistic teachings of Jesus Christ.

Kabir was a quintessential symbol of universalism and a social revolutionary to the core. For him, religion was a manifestation of the human being's search within the self. His personality, his simplicity born out of self-realisation, and the force of truth in his words and their resonance in the everyday living experience of the common man and woman made him a highly respected Sant and teacher. His outspokenness and denunciation of the irrational customs, traditions, rituals, superstitions, casteism and religious bigotry were directed against what he saw as the root of all social injustice-religious discord and disharmony.

Sant Kabir contributed immensely to the social awakening of the Indian society. In his songs and verses, Kabir stressed on the dignity of labour and the creation of a casteless social order and on the ushering in of an egalitarian society. His call to rid religion of orthodoxy and to struggle against casteism and to spread the message of love, equality and unity was greatly inspiring. He was indeed one of the forerunners of our later day social and religious reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

Kabirpanthis are doing great service by following the path shown by Sant Kabir and spreading his message of monotheism, importance of following moral code and his denunciation of the evil of casteism and its attendant evils. They are also known for their cosmopolitan and liberal social outlook.

Friends, India has been, since times immemorial, laying great emphasis on peace, harmony and on universal brotherhood and the impact of its civilization and culture has been felt in different parts of the world. Our vision of the world as one family, reflected in our own concept of *Vasudaiva Kutumbakom*, offers the foundation for global peace and coexistence. In evolving and sustaining this approach Sants like Kabir have made tremendous contributions. Their sincere and endless endeavours should always be cherished and should form the basis of our policy of social, linguistic

and religious tolerance amongst our enormous diversity. Learning the right lessons from the lives of great men like Sant Kabir, it should be our endeavour today to ensure that, narrow-mindedness, intolerance, parochialism and obsession with ritualism are replaced by a broad vision and lasting human values and a deeper devotion to duty. Evils like casteism, sectarianism and religious fanaticism must give way to a new order based on lofty values like compassion, humanism, integrity, service and sacrifice.

Practice of religion should be based on service to the suffering humanity. Today, our country is faced with enormous challenges and there is a crisis of character and faith. It is only by following the humanistic and inclusive teachings of Sants and seers like Kabir that we can build a great future for our country, where there will be no distinction based on caste, creed, region or language or any other divisive factors.

Friends, speaking at this historic place of birth and the *karmabhoomi* of Sant Kabir, I am reminded of the significant role the Sidhapeeth Kabirchaura Math, has been playing in spreading the message of Kabir and in preserving his heritage. It is of great significance that it has been celebrating the Kabir Jayanti function without a gap for the last six centuries at this *karmabhoomi*. This historic place has been a symbol of a new and progressive society. It has inspired several movements directed against injustice, inequality and social evils. The presence of large number of devotees and followers of Kabir in today's function also speaks volumes about the relevance of Kabir's message of universal brotherhood for our times too.

Before I conclude, I once again, extend my felicitations to the Sidhapeeth Kabirchura Math, Moolgadi Trust, for taking the initiatives to organize this function today. I am sure, this beautiful Complex will be a source of inspiration for people in following the path shown by Sant Kabir. Today, on the occasion of laying the Foundation Stone of Kabir Smarak, let us all rededicate ourselves to the lofty ideals and values which Kabir preached and practiced and internalize the same in our own lives.

Thank you.

PROFESSOR HIREN MUKERJEE: A LEGENDARY PARLIAMENTARIAN*

I consider it a great privilege and an honour to welcome the distinguished gathering to this august Hall of the Indian Parliament which has been witness to many historic events. May I take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to Respected Upa-Rashtrapatiji, Respected Pradhan Mantriji, and other distinguished guests for being with us on the occasion of the Inaugural Prof. Hiren Mukerjee Memorial Annual Parliamentary Lecture, organized by the Parliament of India, in the memory and in honour of the legendary parliamentarian, outstanding scholar and veteran Communist leader, Prof. Hiren Mukerjee. I would like to particularly thank Bharat Ratna and Nobel Laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen for graciously acceding to our request to deliver the Lecture on a theme dear to both him and Prof. Hiren Mukerjee.

On this occasion, we are happy to be able to unveil the portrait of Prof. Hiren Mukerjee. We are grateful to the Government of West Bengal for donating the portrait and to Hon'ble Upa Rashtrapatiji for kindly agreeing to unveil it before this distinguished gathering.

Prof. Hirendra Nath Mukerjee was a brilliant parliamentarian who had the distinction of being a member of Parliament for five consecutive terms from the early years of the Republic till 1977. An eminent historian, a prolific writer, an exceptional parliamentarian and a spell-binding orator, Prof. Hiren Mukerjee left an indelible imprint of his multi-faceted personality on our country's parliamentary and political life by his erudition, his articulation and his remarkable contributions in enriching our parliamentary institutions. It is to place on record our profound appreciation and gratitude to this distinguished parliamentarian that the Parliament of India has instituted this Annual Lecture Series.

Today, we have in our midst one of the most distinguished economists and acknowledged intellectuals in the world, Prof. Amartya Sen, to deliver the First Lecture, on the theme, '*Demands of Social Justice*'. Prof. Sen has always been deeply committed to human dignity and equality and to the welfare of the poor and the deprived.

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* At the inaugural Professor Hiren Mukerjee Memorial Annual Parliamentary Lecture on *Demands of Social Justice* by Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen, Central Hall, Parliament House, New Delhi (11 August 2008).

Social Justice is a theme which was dealt with extensively by Prof. Hiren Mukerjee during his life time. The running theme of Prof. Hiren Mukerjee's conviction was the concern for the poor and the downtrodden and until the last, he believed in the need to change society for the all-round development of the country and the citizens. Prof. Amartya Sen too is an ardent and articulate advocate of a just and inclusive society, in which no section of the people, particularly the poor, will be denied social and economic opportunities and the fruits of progress and prosperity will be enjoyed by all. Given Prof. Hiren Mukerjee's and Prof. Amartya Sen's social and intellectual sensitivity and deep humanism, it is only appropriate that the theme of today's Lecture is 'Demands of Social Justice'.

We have introduced this Lecture Series with a view to help bring in some of the issues of great concern to the common people of our country and of contemporary relevance to the centre-stage of our socio-political discourse. It is only appropriate that Parliament, being the highest representative body of the people, should initiate that process. We have to go a long way in building a progressive and prosperous India that our Founding Fathers had visualized for the country at the dawn of Independence. Providing social and economic justice to the vast segments of the masses who have been kept out of the mainstream of our socio-political life should be among the core concerns of our country today and it is a great challenge before our national leadership to look beyond partisan and confrontational politics and to work unitedly to realize this unfulfilled promise of our freedom within the framework of a healthy democratic society. Prof. Sen's Lecture this evening will stimulate a national debate on the need to create conditions for all our citizens, regardless of their caste and creed, to enjoy justice and equality and other democratic rights for a dignified existence.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, in its Nobel Citation to Prof. Amartya Sen had said: 'By combining tools from economics and philosophy, he has restored an ethical dimension to the discussion of vital economic problems'. It is indeed a matter of honour for us that Prof. Amartya Sen has very kindly accepted our invitation to deliver the First Prof. Hiren Mukerjee Memorial Annual Parliamentary Lecture for which we are greatly indebted to him. I am sure that this august assembly will greatly benefit from Prof. Amartya Sen's profound scholarship and his perceptive understanding of the 'Demands of Social Justice'.

With these words, I now once again heartily welcome this distinguished gathering to this Lecture.

Thank you.

KHUSHWANT SINGH: A CRUSADER OF SOCIAL HARMONY*

It is indeed a matter of pleasure and an honour for me to be here and to have the opportunity to associate myself with this function to give away the National Amity Award for promoting social harmony instituted by the Foundation for Amity and National Solidarity (FANS), to one of our most esteemed citizens Shri Khushwant Singhji.

I compliment the foundation on instituting this prestigious award to propagate the ideals of national integration, communal harmony and universal brotherhood, which are essential for our survival as a nation. It is commendable that such an Award gives recognition to an Indian citizen with commendable service towards national integration and unity of the people. I extend my heartiest felicitations to Shri Khushwant Singhji on his being chosen as the recipient this year. In receiving this prestigious award, Shri Khushwant Singhji joins a galaxy of eminent Indians like Nani Palkhivala, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, Jathedar Jiwan Singh Umranangal, Smt. Nirmala Deshpande and Dr. Farooq Abdullah, all of whom have played a remarkable role in furthering the cause of social harmony, fraternity and humanism. I compliment the distinguished members of the Jury for their excellent choice.

The Foundation for Amity and National Solidarity, with its motto 'Amity and National Solidarity', has been playing a notable role in promoting national unity, communal harmony and national integration and has provided an important platform to people from all sections of society to interact with one another and imbibe and encourage the spirit of tolerance, broad-mindedness and respect for differing perceptions. It is particularly praiseworthy that the organisation's efforts are aimed at building a peaceful and well-integrated society, where everybody gets equal opportunity, irrespective of their caste, creed and religion, to become a part of the national mainstream.

Shri Khushwant Singh's is undoubtedly a multi-faceted personality. He is at once one of our outstanding litterateurs and an extremely popular author, an incisive political commentator, a leading media person, historian, parliamentarian, orator and social critic, as also a staunch crusader of

* At the function to give away the National Amity Award instituted by the Foundation for Amity and National Solidarity to Shri Khushwant Singh, New Delhi (26 September 2008).

democratic, secular and humanistic values. He has always expressed his views on various issues facing the nation with rare fearlessness and refreshing candour.

Shri Khushwant Singh is an author respected by his peers and read with a great deal of admiration by the discerning public. His creative thinking and fearless articulation of views have added a new dimension to the field of journalism. As a former member of the Rajya Sabha from 1980 to 1986, he also made significant contribution for the consolidation of our polity. His classic two-volume history of the Sikhs and several novels, including the widely acclaimed *Train to Pakistan and Delhi* are rich contributions to our world of letters. His works portray a very sensitive picture of the issues of our people, their urges and aspirations, their frustration and fears. His profound words also delineate the divisive and sectarian tendencies prevalent in the country and their perils and pitfalls.

It is wellknown that Shri Khushwant Singhji possesses a distinctive style and sense of humour which strikes a chord in his millions of readers and fans. Shri Khushwant Singh's writing is so endearingly popular that his weekly column, 'With Malice Towards One and All' is among the most widely read features in the country for many years. Those columns reflect his reactions to various kinds of malice our society is afflicted with. His admirable capacity to laugh at himself, is a rare quality indeed. One of the hallmarks of his writings is its ubiquitous humour. And it is this unique sense of humour that has made him one of the most sought-after writers in the country. With his intellectual honesty, remarkable literary skill and universal popularity, he has indeed become a legend in his own lifetime.

Shri Khushwant Singhji has played through his many works a crucial role in shaping the attitude of the people towards social and political issues and secular values which have been deeply ingrained in our culture. As a keen observer of human behaviour, he has excelled himself in delineating the intricacies of human character. With a deep understanding of human nature and a rare sensitivity, he is able to depict varied human relationships with an element of authenticity. One of the most striking aspects of his writings is his exemplary honesty and courage of conviction, which is a true reflection of his personality.

Friends, a country like India, with its innumerable languages and dialects tremendous mixture of ethnic groups, the diversity of religions and cultura practices cannot but be secular, pluralistic, and tolerant. It is because of its pluralism, diversity and inclusiveness, which we all cherish and nurture, tha India has survived and flourished as a nation. Pluralism is a reality that is inherent in the very nature of the country.

Both the Foundation for Amity and National Solidarity and one of our most distinguished citizens Shri Khushwant Singhji have been contributing in their own ways to educate and sensitise the people about the imperative of secularism and pluralism, which have been our strength.

Journalists and writers can play a significant role in upholding the nationally accepted values of equality, secularism and pluralism. In India, we have a free Press and as a nation, we are deeply committed to that freedom. Our battle against divisiveness, iniquity, poverty, disease, ignorance, communalism and sectarianism can be successful only if it becomes a strong national endeavour, in which all segments of society, particularly the media, involve themselves in full measure. Our journalists can emulate the shining example of Shri Khushwant Singhji who has always used his pen to mercilessly expose and to create a public opinion against the forces of sectarianism, authoritarian tendencies, communalism and chauvinism.

Friends, a stable social order rests on the pillars of peace, security and justice. We must ensure that each of these pillars is strong and resilient at all times. Today, our country is confronted with much greater danger of communalism, parochialism and terrorism which pose a serious threat to our unity, national integrity and democratic values. There is an urgent need to nurture the values of secularism and democracy in our society so that our future generation is rid of the scourge of extremism and fundamentalism. We all have to stand united to defeat the threats to the nation's unity and integrity, both from within and without. That will be a fitting manner to show our respect to people like Shri Khushwant Singhji who have all through their life, forcefully underscored the dangers which the communal, disruptive and sectarian elements are posing to the country.

I conclude by once again extending my heartiest congratulations to Shri Khushwant Singhji on receiving the National Amity Award. The organizers of this function deserve all compliments for bestowing this prestigious award on Shri Khushwant Singh who has done his calling proud and who is in every way worthy of being conferred this honour. May I take this opportunity to wish him good health and all the very best to Shri Khushwant Singhji in the years ahead. I would also like to extend my best wishes to the Foundation for Amity and National Solidarity in their laudable endeavours to the cause of national values.

Thank you.

THICH NHAT HANH: LEADING WITH COURAGE AND COMPASSION*

We are indeed honoured to have with us this morning, the distinguished zen master Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh the greatly respected seer, philosopher and peace-activist, to speak to us on 'compassion and courage', a theme most relevant to our contemporary times than ever before. I respectfully welcome him to address this distinguished gathering.

Hon'ble Thay needs no introduction to this august gathering. His role and contribution towards restoration of peace and development in the war-ravaged Vietnam is well known and his has been a voice of sanity and reason for the world at large, in the past several decades. He is not just a preacher, but an activist and a promoter of peace and compassion. His life and deeds are the sterling examples of untiring efforts to bring peace and happiness to the victims of violence of all kinds. Through his painstaking efforts, he has rebuilt villages ravaged by war, and set up numerous schools and medical centres, to bring relief to the victims of violence.

Preaching peace and harmony is Thay's passion and pursuit of life. At a time when the world community, including our own country, is experiencing so much of strife, mostly created deliberately by misguided elements for short-term gains, his words of wisdom would provide the much-needed beacon of hope and a healing touch to many.

The most powerful message that went out to the world from our centuries long struggle for freedom was the futility of violence in achieving any objective, howsoever lofty it could be. The world formally recognized and endorsed this message when the United Nations declared 2 October, the Birth Anniversary Day of Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest apostles of peace and non-violence, as the International Day of Non-Violence.

Hon'ble Thich Nhat Hanh rightly, if I may say so, reminds us that violence only begets violence and that the only antidote to violence, anger and hatred is compassion. The world should always remember his message that 'violence and strife, which we notice today in contemporary society, are the symptoms of the deep-seated social malice, which needs to be addressed by understanding and with compassion'.

* Introductory Remarks at the Lecture for Members of Parliament on *Leading with Courage and Compassion* by Hon'ble Thich Nhat Hanh, New Delhi (17 October 2008).

We are happy that Venerable Thay is able to spare his valuable time to speak to us, the Parliamentarians, as Parliament is the ultimate conflict resolution forum, particularly in a democratic form of government. It is here that the hopes, aspirations, fears and frustrations of the people should be articulated and resolved through dialogue, debate, deliberations and discussions and through a process of conciliation. In spite of all its imperfections, which one may point out, we do not have any better alternative to this great people's institution which needs to be constantly nurtured and strengthened and be cleansed of its aberrations, to make it more receptive to people's problems and for finding solutions.

With these few words, I have great pleasure in inviting Hon'ble Thich Nhat Hanh to address us.

Thank you.

MADHU LIMAYE: A PARLIAMENTARIAN PAR EXCELLENCE*

I am happy that the Lok Sabha Secretariat has brought out a Monograph on Shri Madhu Limaye, incorporating select speeches delivered by him in Parliament on a wide range of subjects. I would like to thank Hon'ble Member of Parliament, Shri Mohan Singhji for taking the initiative for the publication of this Volume through our Lok Sabha Secretariat.

During the Fourteenth Lok Sabha itself, I am happy that the Lok Sabha has been able to publish the collection of speeches of Professor Hiren Mukherjee, Shri Indrajit Gupta, Shri Jagjivan Ram and Shri Madhu Dandvate and now of Shri Madhu Limaye and I feel proud of the same.

The Monograph is a humble tribute to the memory of Shri Madhu Limaye, one of the greatest parliamentarians, a great democrat and an avowed socialist. He was a member of the Lok Sabha for four terms from 1964 to 1979. His thorough knowledge and understanding of the Rules of Procedure, conventions and particularly Directions from the Chair, helped him greatly in utilizing the various parliamentary devices to put forward people's causes effectively. He made full use of the floor of the House to expose the acts of omission and commission of the Executive and also in effectively articulating the matters concerning the ordinary people.

Shri Limaye never indulged in any acts or behaviour that was not expected of a member of Parliament or that in any way would impinge on the dignity of our supreme legislative body. He was an example of a parliamentarian *par excellence* – articulate, effective, and forthright, yet amiable, whom members heard with great respect.

Shri Madhu Limaye's life is a saga of unblemished character, honesty, discipline, courage, sacrifice and truthfulness. I had the good fortune of being in the Fifth and the Sixth Lok Sabha with him and I always greatly benefited by listening to him. What a fall in the standard in the conduct of the members these days in the Legislature and I only hope that the contribution and speeches of Limayeji will put some sense of duty and decency of behaviour in our present day members.

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* At the Function to release the Monograph *Madhu Limaye in Parliament—A Commemorative Volume*, New Delhi (23 October 2008).

The dignity of Parliament as the highest representative body and its legitimacy as the most significant conflict management institution now-a-days is greatly eroded by reason of the most derogatory conduct of the members, which has shaken faith of the ordinary people in the system of parliamentary democracy.

Shri Madhu Limayeji attached great importance to ethical values and remained committed to them in public life. Shri Limaye laid great emphasis on transparency and accountability not only for governance but also in the conduct of politicians, particularly elected representatives, as he himself followed.

A true socialist, Shri Limaye devoted himself in serving the cause of the downtrodden and worked hard for eradicating social evils and differences based on caste, religion, language, etc. He worked for a progressive and democratic India based on secularism and inclusiveness and strongly championed the cause of the women and backward classes, irrespective of their caste and religion.

For Shri Limayeji, service to the nation was not a profession to be rewarded by the State; he considered it as a duty of each and every individual. Such was his sense of self-respect that he even refused to accept the pension offered by the Government for his active participation in the freedom struggle. He also declined to accept the pension available to former members of Parliament and preferred to live on an earning through his writings.

We have to ensure that more and more people with commitment and dedication as that of Shri Madhu Limaye come into Parliament and actively participate in the proper working of the system for the welfare of the masses. I am sure the profound speeches Shri Limaye delivered in Parliament on a large number of subjects would provide inspiration to others to look at the challenges before us in proper perspective and to perform adequately.

I once again compliment the Secretary-General, Lok Sabha, and his team of officers on bringing out the Monograph on Shri Madhu Limaye. I am sure the publication will be a source of inspiration to all those who cherish parliamentary democracy.

With these words, I have great pleasure in releasing the monograph.

Thank you.

SHRI SHANTI BHUSHAN: A MANY SPLENDOURED PERSONALITY*

I am extremely sorry that because of my illness and strict medical injunction, I am not able to attend the important function when 'Courting Destiny: a Memoir' authored by Shri Shanti Bhushan, one of the brightest legal minds of our country, is being released, to which I was looking forward. I felt it a great honour when I was invited by Prashant Bhushan to be present and participate at the happy occasion. I have taken the liberty of sending these few pages on the publication and about its author, which I had prepared before I had to go to the Hospital.

Memoirs have their own importance, particularly authored by those few whose life and times have influenced the shaping of the history of a country or an institution. Shri Shanti Bhushan, in his own inimitable style, has made great contribution on the contemporary political, legal and constitutional history of our nation, and, as such, his Memoirs are a compelling read.

It is not left to every lawyer to command unceasing respect over a period of sixty years. Shri Shanti Bhushan has achieved this rare fame, having started as a pleader in the district courts of Allahabad way back in 1948. And he never looked back after that. My Father Late Shri N.C. Chatterjee could see Shanti Bhushanji's immense potential even in those formative years. When some party approached him seeking his advice on a lawyer for a very complex case, he said, 'if you want glamour, go for Shri ..... but if you want solid merit, then you can go to a young lawyer, Shanti Bhushan'. Today, I am sure everyone will agree that Shanti Bhushanji has fully justified my father's trust in his capabilities in manifold ways.

During his sixty-year long innings in public life, Shri Shanti Bhushan has endeavoured to strengthen our constitutional edifice as a distinguished lawyer learned Advocate-General, a responsible and responsive member of the Rajya Sabha, an efficient and erudite Minister of Law and Justice and a conscientious campaigner for electoral reforms, judicial accountability and probity in public life.

* At the release of the book *Courting Destiny* by Shri Shanti Bhushan, New Delhi (11 Novembe 2008).

As a legal luminary, Shri Shanti Bhushan has practised both in the High Courts and the Supreme Court and has won many cases, leaving behind his definitive footprints which have become precedents for posterity. One should mention the *Habeas Corpus* case in which his main argument was that the suspension of articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution did not come in the way of a *habeas corpus* petition. He contended that even when fundamental rights did not exist, a *habeas corpus* petition was maintainable. As Shanti Bhushanji maintained, the citizens could be deprived of their liberty only in accordance with the provisions of the law and fought the case passionately with his cogent and incisive arguments.

All through his illustrious legal career, he has upheld the innate spirit of the Constitution and our democratic framework. Many significant judicial pronouncements given by the High Courts and Supreme Court, especially some having a bearing on constitutional rights of the people, reflect Shri Shanti Bhushan's ardent advocacy. His memoirs, thankfully, give a very detailed account of several such cases which will be of great relevance at all times.

Shri Shanti Bhushan has always been fully conscious of the spirit of the Constitution and has respected the power and jurisdiction of the other organs of State, *viz.*, the Legislature and the Executive. He has always upheld what I often refer to as the *Laxman Rekha* of our democratic edifice and worked for a harmonious relationship among the different organs of State. For him, what is important is the supremacy of the people and their hopes and aspirations. No organ of the State is above the people. That is the spirit of the Constitution and that is the *raison d'etre* of periodic elections to the representative bodies like the Parliament, the Legislative Assemblies and even the *Panchayats* at the grassroots level.

I would like to reiterate that it is through the representative bodies that people exercise their sovereign rights and that is why I always insist that the representative bodies should be allowed to function in a smooth and orderly manner. As a member of the Lok Sabha, I had the opportunity to observe Shri Shanti Bhushan's remarkable parliamentary skill when he was the Minister of Law in the Janata Party Government. He effortlessly combined his legal and juridical acumen with the finest tenets of parliamentary behaviour during those eventful days. I recall with a sense of profound appreciation the consummate skill and rare conviction with which he piloted the historic 44th Constitution Amendment Bill. I am sure he derived special satisfaction that he was able to pilot the 44th Amendment Bill which removed from our organic law the provisions of the 42nd Amendment Act, which had tarnished our Constitution.

The conduct of free and fair elections and individual liberty and human freedoms have been fundamental concerns of Shanti Bhushanji, which have come out very eloquently in his memoirs. Vigilant people like Shri Shanti Bhushan fought courageously against the stifling of dissent and democracy during the Internal Emergency to put the nation back on the right track.

Shri Shanti Bhushan is not only an illustrious legal practitioner, but also an activist lawyer. His sustained campaign to reform the Judiciary of the several ills afflicting it is highly commendable. He has also been a champion of judicial accountability about which much is talked about these days even in the highest judicial circles. Shanti Bhushanji has contributed in no small measure in promoting accountability, probity and transparency on the part of the Judiciary.

In this context, I recall the occasion when we met in connection with the petition against Justice Ramaswamy seeking his impeachment and how he campaigned vigorously to ensure that the process was not derailed because of political reasons. As I said in Parliament during the impeachment motion, it was Parliament that was on trial and that the very survival of public confidence in the Judiciary and indeed in democracy was at stake. It is another matter that the impeachment fell, though not a single member voted in favour of the Judge.

During his political career, Shanti Bhushanji has showed refreshing leadership qualities and commitment to values and principles and he never veered from his inherent belief in the constitutional ideal of secularism. As a lawyer, he always practised the highest standards of professional behaviour. He has narrated with great sincerity how he once prevented the State from filing a false affidavit in respect of detention of Communists in Uttar Pradesh during the Chinese aggression. Several times, he got offers to join the Bench and I am glad that he did not take it, because he has contributed in the nation's progress in diverse positive ways, which he could not have done from the Bench alone.

The book which is being released today, bears the testimony to the tumultuous years of India's tryst with democracy. The memoir is not only biographical in nature but is also a chronicle of contemporary India. Coming as it does from one who has been intimately involved and associated with our democracy, political system, constitutional history and civil rights movements, I am sure, the book will rightly be treated as authentic source of information for researchers and the intelligentsia. The book is also a mirror of Shri Shanti Bhushan's endearing personality, his character, his conviction his familial values and eventually a reflection of the finer sensitivity of his heart and mind.

I wish and trust that Shri Shanti Bhushan will continue to raise his forceful voice for judicial accountability and electoral reforms and also against societal injustice and for securing and safeguarding the democratic and civil rights of the people. He has won many battles, but the war is far from over; because the voice of the poor, the downtrodden and the vulnerable strata of our society still needs to be raised eloquently to usher in a truly inclusive society. And for that, we need leaders with commitment and compassion, sensitivity and sensibility like Shri Shanti Bhushan.

With these words, I have great pleasure in commending his Memoir to the readers.

DR. LAXMI MALL SINGHVI: A TRUE AMBASSADOR OF INDIA*

It is indeed a matter of privilege and an honour for me to have the opportunity to associate myself with this function today to release the commemorative postage stamp on Dr. Laxmi Mall Singhvi. I thank Dr. Abhishek Singhvi for his gracious invitation to me and for the opportunity afforded to me to pay my respectful homage to Late Dr. Singhvi. I also felicitate the Department of Posts, Government of India, for bringing out this commemorative postage stamp.

Late L.M. Singhvi was a many splendoured personality who was at the same time an eminent constitutionalist, a legal luminary, a distinguished jurist, an outstanding parliamentarian and a respected diplomat. He was also an erudite scholar, a writer of repute, a dedicated environmentalist, an exponent of inter-faith tolerance and, above all, an elder statesman who commanded respect in the country cutting across the ideological spectrum. During his long and distinguished innings, Dr. Singhvi had made lasting contribution to our national and public life in diverse fields and has earned a distinct space for himself in the intellectual and political firmament of the country. As a distinguished jurist, Dr. Singhvi contributed significantly to our constitutional law and human rights. He was an ardent champion of the Rule of Law and fundamental freedom, and his contributions on the inalienability and indivisibility of human rights are indeed laudable. He had conceived and founded the Law Day, which is widely observed by the Bench and the Bar in India on 26 November every year.

Dr. Singhvi's legal acumen was globally recognized when he was elected member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague and he had close association with many multilateral bodies and the United Nations and its accredited agencies.

An eminent parliamentarian, Dr. Singhvi made great contributions by his effective articulation of issues of concern to the nation. He was always listened to in rapt attention by all sections of both the Houses of Parliament of which he was a member.

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* At the release of the Commemorative Postage Stamp on Dr. Laxmi Mall Shinghvi, New Delhi (8 December 2008).

Dr. Singhvi was always committed to secularism and inter-faith tolerance. He had repeatedly emphasized that 'secularism is a living tissue in the body of India's composite culture drawing nourishment from the best of the Indian thought and example'. Today, with communal violence and hatred in many parts of the country, what we need is a firm voice and a clear demonstration of our collective will to fight against all elements that spread communal hatred and disharmony, as was articulated by Dr. Singhvi.

Over the years, there is a discernible deterioration in the quality of our democratic life, characterized by divisive and what I call confrontational politics and lack of respect for dissent, affecting the core institutions of democratic governance. We need to strengthen urgently the initiatives and examples set by eminent people like Dr. Singhvi in bridging the communal divide and in assuaging the wounded feelings of the people.

Dr. Singhvi was a brilliant student all through his student days and he has been associated with a number of prestigious Universities in India and abroad. We should remember his wise words that 'Education is that knowledge and know-how which offers the key to our emancipation, to a good and just society, to a life of human dignity, equality and freedom. Without it, all else is fool's gold'.

His linguistic and literary merits were also well recognized. Dr. Singhvi was a great orator and he spoke on different subjects like law, jurisprudence, human rights, education and environment. He also left his distinct imprint on Indo-British relations during his term as our High Commissioner in London for almost six years.

Dr. Singhvi represented to the world the best of India's traditions, culture and heritage. He drew inspiration from our millennial civilization and took immense pride in portraying its many splendoured hues to the world at large. He was indeed a true ambassador of India. I have had the privilege of enjoying his friendship and his affection, and I was deeply touched by his encouraging message to me after certain unsavoury events that happened in Parliament in recent years.

It is befitting that the Department of Posts, Government of India, is bringing out a commemorative postage stamp on Dr. L.M. Singhvi whose contribution to India shall ever be treasured. To his memory and to his many achievements in life, I pay my humble homage.

Thank you.

PANAMPILLY GOVINDA MENON: AN INTELLECTUAL GIANT*

It is indeed a matter of great privilege and an honour for me to have the opportunity to associate myself with this function organized to mark the conclusion of the celebrations marking the birth centenary of late Panampilly Govinda Menon, an outstanding leader who made lasting contributions to our Parliament and the polity, particularly to the State of Kerala. I am thankful to my friend and colleague in Parliament Shri C.K. Chandrappan and to the Centenary Celebration Committee, for their kind invitation to me to be here with you all today. I compliment everyone associated with this function for their thoughtful initiative and pay my respectful homage to the memory of late Govinda Menon.

The State of Kerala, which is celebrating its Golden Jubilee, has many reasons to take legitimate pride in its multifarious achievements and impressive socio-economic indices. Its accomplishments in the field of education, health care and social equity are examples for the whole country to emulate. When one realizes that the State has made these achievements in spite of having a weak industrial base it makes your achievements all the more commendable. The State has earned wide acclaim for its history of religious harmony, its identification with the progressive socio-political forces, its denial of political space to sectarian elements and its deep commitment to secular and humanistic values. All these have been made possible by the efforts of the hard-working people of Kerala as also of its visionary leaders, among whom Panampilly Govinda Menon occupies a very special place.

Late Panampilly Govinda Menon was an outstanding leader endowed with a pan-Indian outlook and a national vision. He was an accomplished administrator, a distinguished lawyer, a brilliant orator and a statesman of rare stature. As a political activist, he plunged into the freedom struggle at a very young age and suffered imprisonment on various occasions. A tireless champion of the cause of the poor and the deprived sections, he was an active participant in the well-known Vaikom Satyagraha Movement, which was one of the early initiatives in the country to bring the issue of the civil and political rights of the backward classes to the arena of our freedom

* At the Valedictory Function of the Panampilly Govinda Menon Birth Centenary Celebrations Trichur, Kerala (2 March 2009).

struggle and later into the reckoning of the national leadership. Shri Menon also actively participated in the Temperance Movement and in the campaign for the boycott of foreign clothes. He was one of the pioneers of the Cochin State *Prajamandal*, an organization formed with the aim of ushering in responsible Government, and he continued as one of the chief activists of the organization for a long time.

Shri Menon was an acclaimed legislator, beginning his legislative career at a young age, in 1935. His merit and capabilities earned due recognition and he became a Minister and Chief Minister of the Travancore Cochin State before he moved to the national arena. He also served with distinction as a member of the Constituent Assembly representing the State of Cochin. Later, he was a member of the Provisional Parliament and of the Lok Sabha. In all these different roles he made his distinct mark and left an indelible imprint of his personality.

Shri Govinda Menon's knowledge of parliamentary procedure and constitutional matters was profound. He was able to deal with and make learned exposition on many vexed problems of the country like the necessity of having special provisions with regard to Jammu and Kashmir in the Constitution and the need for having a special majority at all stages of Parliamentary voting with respect to a constitution amendment bill.

Shri Menon put his remarkable legal acumen and oratorical skill to effective use when he was a member of the Constituent assembly. He also served with distinction in several of its Committees. His tenure in the Contituent Assembly, Provincial Parliament and the Third and the Fourth Lok Sabha saw him earn encomiums at the national level. A legal luminary and a very learned leader, his critical and analytical approach to issues and events enabled him to provide new dimensions and perspectives on subjects of national concern. As a Union Minister, handling the portfolios of Food, Agriculture, Community Development and Cooperation and later Law and Social Welfare and, briefly, the Railways, he proved his administrative acumen and made lasting contribution to the governance of our country at very critical stages since our Independence and he was indeed a shining star on our national firmament. Whether as a legislator in Cochin, a member of the Constituent Assembly, the Provisional Parliament and the Lok Sabha, or as a Minister and Chief Minister in the Government of Cochin and of Travancore-Cochin, he brought to bear the distinctive stamp of his high intellect, administrative calibre and a national outlook. A champion of the working class, he was responsible for bringing in many pro-labour legislations in Kerala when he was the Labour Minister here in the early post-independence years. As Education Minister, he made lasting contributions to improve the status of education and the lot of the teachers in the State. His wide and

varied experience came to the utmost use when he was a member of the Third Finance Commission. Another of his abiding passions was books; and quite appropriately, he was one of the pioneers of the Library movement in Kerala.

A man of utmost integrity, Shri Menon was deeply committed to ethical and moral values in public and personal life and to principled politics. He strongly opposed defections from political parties, which was one of the worst banes of the politics of the country in the sixties and the seventies. It was because of this conviction that Shri Govinda Menon underscored the need for curbing the tendency of elected members of Parliament and the State Assemblies to switch their allegiance from one party to another motivated by the lust for power and money. He, therefore, proposed to set a limit on the size of ministries. He said:

> "Bloated Cabinets are occasioned on account of the phenomenon of defections, sometimes to avoid defections and sometimes because defections took place. Where a ministry is toppled as a result of defections, those who have defected have been expecting something in return and if that something was not available, they would have re-defected, if that word could be used. Therefore, we see that in many places Cabinets out of size have come into existence... The people would not like it and democracy would come to be ridiculed if we have too large or too big Cabinets either in the States or in the Centre... Whatever be the law which we enact and whatever be the amendments which we effected in the Constitution, it would be much better if we could have a common moral code which would be adhered to by different political parties."

It took us many more years before an effective legislation could be put in place to curb this menace, which Shri Govinda Menon identified so early and which had undermined the sanctity of our political processes for decades together.

Shri Govinda Menon had an abiding concern for all aspects of national development and took up various issues relating to banking, labour and education. He was instrumental in enacting many notable legislations which included the Banking Companies Nationalization Bill, which had a great impact on our economy. As you would recall, the nationalization of 14 commercial banks in July 1969 represented a watershed in the history of Indian economy.

Friends, today, when we have entered, into the seventh decade of freedom we need to introspect and see if we are still going along the path shown by great leaders like Panampilly Govinda Menon who was among the founders

and path-finders of modern India. Today, our democratic experiments are at a cross road. While taking pride in being the largest democracy in the world, we need also to introspect about the quality of democracy that we have achieved and see to what extent have various kinds of aberrations crept into it over the years. There are justifiable reasons for sections of our people to be cynical about the culture of politics in the country. The institutions associated with our democracy are not functioning in a manner which will evoke the respect and admiration of the people, particularly our youth. Similarly, forces of divisiveness and communalism pose a grave threat to our democratic and secular fabric. Growing corruption, the politics of confrontation and the culture of intolerance and violence creeping into our polity and the society have to be eliminated if we have to continue to sustain people's faith in our system.

Despite making spectacular progress in various fields, we cannot lose sight of the fact that our country is afflicted with multifarious problems of poverty, unemployment, ignorance and socio-economic inequality. It is, therefore, imperative for us to identify those segments that have so far not been effectively touched by six decades of planned development and take the initiatives to bring them also into the national mainstream. The new economic forces of today, no doubt, are bringing along with them new opportunities for development and for contributing to nation-building. The policies and programmes formulated to augment economic growth should also contribute towards improving the lives of the poor and the neglected sections of our society. It is important for us to ensure that we do not leave anyone behind and that the benefits of development reach every one, particularly the rural masses who have not been effectively touched by the efforts of the past nearly six decades of freedom.

We have to strive for growth with a human face that is socially equitable and regionally balanced, where all the sectors and the entire population partake of the fruits of our growing economy. We need to strive to build a nation where our people, specially those belonging to the vulnerable sections of the community, will be entitled to earn their living, to have quality education, good employment opportunities, the right to access good health-care, to obtain basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, drinking water and indeed will be entitled to and actually have the freedom to live in dignity, instead of being forced to accept what is being doled out by the system.

It is also important for all sections of the society to realize that it is of little use to be just critical of the aberrations or non-achievements in the society. An attitude of fault-finding with our democracy's functioning and expecting of someone else to apply the correctives is not going to help in addressing the aberrations that have crept into our system. Democracy is only as good as its people. Therefore more and more well-meaning people

need to come forward to shoulder the responsibility of restoring the glory of our democracy. This is the lesson we need to learn from the lives of great leaders like Panampilly Govinda Menon whose memory we are honouring today.

Today, as we are concluding the Centenary Celebrations of Late Panampilly Govinda Menon, I once again pay my tributes to him as an outstanding leader, who was an embodiment of integrity, social and intellectual sensitivity and uprightness and an institution builder. The life of Shri Menon was an inspiring saga of service and sacrifice to the cause of the nation and its people. I am sure that his lofty ideals and laudable values will continue to inspire and guide our people.

Thank you.

BABY JOHN: AN INSPIRING LEGACY*

It is my privilege to be here with you all at this Function. I am, indeed, honoured and extremely grateful to the Baby John Foundation for their decision to confer the first Baby John Award on me. The Award has been instituted by the Foundation for the laudable objective of carrying forward the rich legacy, and the values and ideals cherished by Late Baby John, one of the most outstanding leaders of Kerala and the doyen of the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

Before I proceed, I pay my humble and respectful tributes to a truly multi-faceted and outstanding leader, who strode like a colossus on Kerala's public life for nearly half a century. Literally and figuratively, Shri Baby John was one of the tallest leaders of Kerala and was the quintessential person, who dedicated his life in the service of the poor and the needy and was greatly concerned towards bringing about comprehensive development of his coastal constituency. Baby John was perhaps the most accessible leader of his times. It was known that political leaders of all hues and ordinary people could walk into his house at any time of the day or night, which showed the respect he had for them, irrespective of the Party they belonged to. The constituency that he nursed and nurtured, Chavara, was his *karmaboomi* from where he launched his many political campaigns and battles. The people of Chavara gave him their love and affection in ample measure. All through his public life, he related to them, shared their joys and sorrows, and strived to ameliorate their lot. Baby John was returned to the Kerala Legislative Assembly as many as eleven times, that too against many 'waves' and 'counter-waves' as one would see in the Arabian Sea of his backyard. He was the key-figure in the coalition politics of Kerala and his unparalled legislative record was undoubtedly the most eloquent testimony to his popularity among the masses.

But Baby John was much more than a mere representative of Chavara. He represented a political ideology to which he was fully committed till his very last day. He never strayed from the ideology which he assiduously spread among his thousands and thousands of supporters. The rare earth factory workers, the fishermen, the farmers, the coir workers, all crowded around him to share their tales of woe and also for guidance and inspiration. And Baby John never disappointed them: the considerable progress that the

* While accepting the First Baby John Memorial Foundation Award at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala (3 March 2009).

region achieved under his dynamic stewardship speaks volumes of his unswerving attachment to his constituents.

Shri Baby John was not merely a grassroots leader but was one who endeared himself to one and all with his many admirable qualities. He was also a leader for whom the larger public interest was of more importance than narrow political or personal interest. His administrative acumen was legendary and his deft handling of demanding portfolios like Revenue, Education, Fisheries, Labour, and others in different Cabinets earned him widespread approbation. He left behind an indelible impression as a progressive administrator in all the Departments he headed, successfully combining his political ideology and pragmatic philosophy, which is why Baby John's unique contributions to public service and social welfare would always be remembered. This faithful follower of Marxism-Leninism remained steadfast in his adherence to the ideology and he resisted several pressures and skillfully handled various crises that afflicted Kerala politics, especially during the last three decades of the 20th Century.

In his political career spread over more than fifty eventful years, Shri Baby John firmly imprinted his unique stamp of individuality as a freedom fighter, trade union leader, legislator and administrator. The compulsions of coalition politics brought out the best in Baby John, whose wisdom and farsightedness were specially acclaimed by political analysts. For his adroit handling of crisis situations and tactful negotiating capabilities, Baby John had become an iconic image ingrained in the peoples' mind. The varied roles he played in public life had a decisive influence in steering the course of the political history of the Kerala Coast. Baby John was always the man of the hour who could be depended upon to draw up a workable formula in extremely volatile situations. With consummate skill, he charted out untrammeled courses during the political evolution of the State of Kerala. He was indeed a friend, philosopher and guide to generations of Kerala's political leaders. If, today, Kerala's coalition politics works well with considerable governmental stability unlike in several other States, it owes in no small measure to Shri Baby John who was its finest craftsman. It is but rarely that one comes across such qualities in a political leader and it is wholly befitting that the Baby John Memorial Foundation set up by his worthy son Shri Shibu Baby John has instituted an Award in his name to recall his services to the State and the country to spread his message among the people at large.

I feel extremely humble to receive the award instituted to honour the memory of such a great leader and to acknowledge his monumental service at a time when the political class has ceased to inspire confidence among the people. There is a general perception that politics is no longer an honourable profession. Some sections of the media and some intellectuals are trying to

propagate the myth that all politicians are dishonest and irresponsible. This, I submit, is a wrong and dangerous idea, which will affect the country's progress and democracy itself will be in danger. We can't visualize democracy without committed and principled political activities. The freedom struggle was the greatest political action this country has ever seen or experienced. It is a matter of concern that many political movements in India today are getting increasingly divorced from ideology and fundamental precepts. The moral degradation is affecting the vitals of our political milieu. Political parties are incurring the opprobrium of being closely associated with antisocial activities and criminals, which is discouraging many people, specially the young people, from joining politics. But what is the remedy? Is it enough that we criticize the politicians and keep quiet? If the right-thinking and committed people do not come forward and take part in public affairs, the political space will continue to be occupied by undesirable elements, even criminals. Plato said that if good men do not enter politics, they must be prepared to be governed by bad men. It has also become fashionable for intellectuals to revile and denigrate politicians. Whether one likes it or not or wishes to avoid it or not, politics will govern the people and the nation as a whole. I have in my numerous interactions with the youngsters always urged them to be participants in the great task of bringing about the required changes. We need, today, intelligent, educated young men and women with commitment to the basic values to be pro-active in bringing about the much needed changes.

I am sorry to say that India's politics is now being considered to be the stepping stone for achieving personal benefits at the cost of the nation and there is now near total collapse of moral values in our public life. India's freedom movement was always value-based. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation insisted on the purity of means. Being the greatest visionary, Gandhiji knew that the Indian social revolution could be brought about only by morally strong men. Our freedom fighters and leaders who laid the foundation of the Republic, bequeathed us great moral traditions and the value systems. It is the responsibility of the Indian people to uphold this legacy and regenerate the values which seemed to have disappeared from our collective actions and pursuits.

India has achieved tremendous progress in the economic and social sectors during the past 60 years. We are counted as an economic power with great potential. We are fast becoming a fully literate nation with some of our States achieving cent percent literacy. As an Indian, we are proud that Kerala achieved full literacy years back. We are a super power in the information technology. It is a paradox that when the country is about to take off as an economic power, our polity is getting divided by divisive and confrontational politics. Political parties are being formed on the basis of religion or castes and communities. These narrow loyalties will destroy the national unity and people will see themselves as Marathis, Gujaratis, Tamils or Bengalis only.

There is a political party in a State whose supporters drive out the people from other States on the plea of providing job opportunities to the so-called sons of the soil. Our Constitution gives freedom to its citizens to move freely and live in any part of its territory. But some political formations and self-seeking so-called leaders have made a mockery of the freedom enshrined in the Constitution. We have political parties inciting religious fundamentalism which is destroying the liberal ethos of the country. Even political formations which have a liberal outlook are too eager to compromise on their basic ideological positions in order to ally with or get the support of fundamentalist or sectarian parties. Where does it all lead us? If we emphasise on matters which divide us and not on those which unite us and consider ourselves as Malayalees, Bengalis or Tamils or North Indians and South Indians or Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, the concept of India as a united, secular, progressive and liberal nation will receive the greatest set-back and the Indian dream of being a democratic and progressive nation will perish.

I have the honour to be in the supreme legislature of the country for the past 39 years. I have tried to make my humble contribution to the discussions and debates which took place in that House on issues and problems concerning the life of the people. I had the honour of being elected unanimously as the Speaker. But it is a matter of great concern now that the glory of our democratic institutions is getting fast eroded because of the disruptions in the legislatures, on often trivial issues. It is our constitutional and democratic obligation to ensure that the legislatures function properly, without being disrupted by members coming to the well of the House and shouting slogans. Legislators abandoning the route of debate and discussion in favour of slogan shouting and parading in the well of the House and disrupting the proceedings is the symptom of a deeper malaise. I believe that the strong adversarial relationship among the political parties is to a very great extent responsible for this situation. The civilized interactions which used to take place among leaders of different political parties has almost ceased to exist. Their relationship today is characterized by deep antagonism and conflict and even hatred for each other. The Indian polity should be governed on the basis of a consensus on the fundamentals of governance. However, in an environment of deep hostilities and distrust, the fundamentals of a conscientious politics are breaking down which will bring disaster to the country. What is urgently required is not to allow the Indian consensus to break down and to regenerate the culture of civilized dialogue in the political class.

The media can play a constructive role in sensitizing the people in general and the political class in particular to the need to preserve India's basic unity. The consensus on fundamental approaches and the inter-party dialogue are necessary for the orderly transformation of the complex Indian society. The media seems to emphasise more on sensationalism than constructive deliberations in the legislatures and enlightened participation by the Members

reluctant to address deeper issues. Unfortunately reporting of Parliamentary Proceedings, serious business done by Parliament hardly find any place in the newspapers. I have had many interactions with the media leaders on the issue of coverage of Parliamentary proceedings, but unfortunately there has hardly been any response. As the Fourth Estate, the media has the obligation, as I feel, to inform the people of what their representatives are doing in the legislature. There was a time when the newspapers used to devote at least one page exclusively to Parliament's proceedings. But now many national newspapers just ignore them. Sustaining parliamentary democracy should be the concern of the Fourth Estate as well, which should be sensitive to the need to strengthen the institution of Parliament. In this context, I must mention about a humble initiative, I took, in starting a TV channel for Lok Sabha two years ago. My intention has been to take Parliament nearer to the people. But as an Indian, I am proud that this is the only channel in the world which is wholly owned and controlled by the House of Parliament. Now millions of houses in this country can watch the Parliament proceedings live.

Friends, I had started out as a Parliamentarian 39 years ago. I have now reached the end of my journey. I recall the momentous things happening in Parliament, in which I was an humble participant. Huge changes have taken place in the social, cultural and economic profile of our representatives. Changes have taken place in the norms of conduct of the members of our legislatures. The Indian society is undergoing a transformation. Social relationships are changing fast and perhaps, the old framework of discipline and norms of conduct may be becoming inadequate to accommodate the urges of the forces, history is unleashing. Legislature is the crucial arena where this dialectics is going to play out. I am sure the Indian people's tryst with democracy will result in institutional robustness and the flowering of a culture characterized by tolerance and openness of mind. Voltaire said, 'I detest what you say but I am prepared to die for your right to say it'.

If the Indian mind can internalize the spirit of this message, our democracy will achieve great heights. Let the new generation strive to make it possible. The people, specially the youth, should be the pro-active agents of change. The young people have the largest stake for the future and they should not be mere critics but themselves should be harbingers of change and remove the aberrations and imperfections from our body politic. I wish them all success.

Friends, I once again thank the Baby John Memorial Foundation and Shri Shibu Baby John and all the friends who are associated with it for giving me this award. You have done me a great honour which I hardly deserve but I shall always cherish the same.

Thank you.

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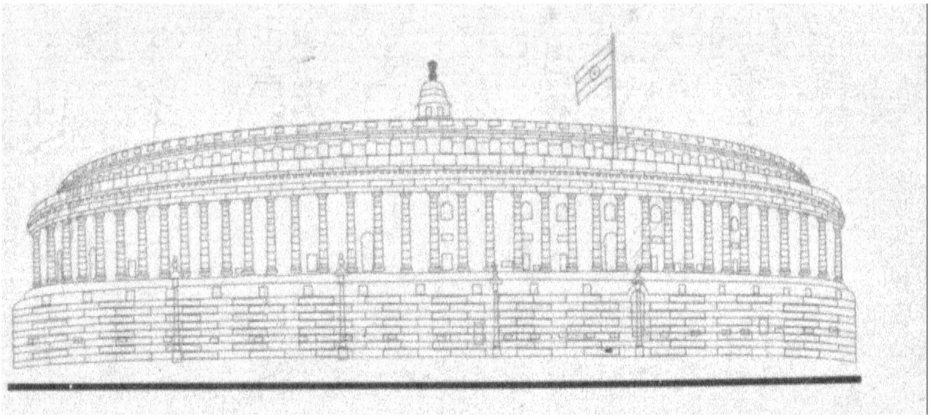
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